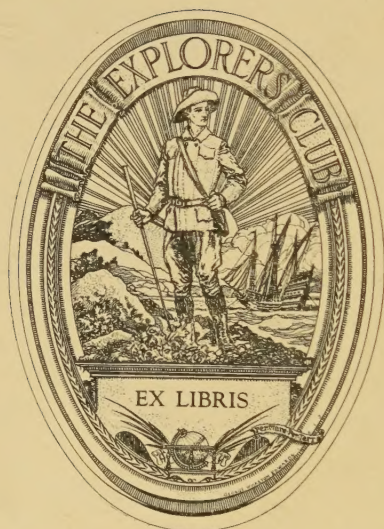


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ACROSS THE PLAINS
IN 1850



FORT LARAMIE, 1849

ACROSS THE PLAINS
IN 1850
BY JOHN STEELE

Edited with introduction and notes

by JOSEPH SCHAFER

*Superintendent of the State Historical Society
of Wisconsin*

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED
CONTEMPORARY DRAWINGS



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INTRODUCTION

THE geographical barrier to communication between the Mississippi Valley and the Pacific Coast is partly in the extensive, high, treeless plains and partly in the rugged but usually bare mountains and plateaus that lie between those two favored regions. Indian hostility complicated the problem at times. The unique frontiersmanship of America found these obstacles a severe test, yet in the space of less than half a century it had surmounted them all.

The master features which determined the search for a transcontinental route were the great rivers whose headwaters interlocked within the mountains and which flowed in opposite directions. Of these the most conspicuous on the eastern slope was the Missouri with its important tributaries rising in the Rockies, while issuing from the same watershed and flowing westward were the Colorado and Columbia, or "River of the West." Jefferson, as early as 1783, when he wrote Notes on Virginia, considered the possibility of finding a relation between the Missouri and the Columbia that might establish a route to the Pacific.¹ In

¹Ford's *Jefferson*, III, p. 92, and p. 130.

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this quest he persisted, urging John Ledyard in 1786 to cross Siberia, drop down from Kamchatka to Nootka Sound, penetrate thence to the Missouri and down that river to the United States.² Four years later he directed André Michaux to find the river which flows westwardly from the highlands giving rise to the Missouri or forfeit the prize offered by the American Philosophical Society for such a discovery. Finally, during his presidency, Jefferson had the satisfaction, through the agency of Lewis and Clark, of opening a travel route to the Pacific.

This was mainly a waterway, the explorers having ascended the Missouri by boat to a point where it becomes unnavigable, crossed the mountains along the courses of small branches and, from a navigable point on the Columbia, floated down to the sea. The land portage amounted to about three hundred miles, two hundred and forty over terrain affording good roads, and sixty over "tremendous mountains" as Lewis wrote Jefferson. He believed the route to be practicable mainly because the Shoshone Indians of the portage region had thousands of horses which were so cheap that packing between the heads of navigation on the two rivers would not prove excessively expensive.³

This route, rendered famous by the circumstances

² Coues, E., *Lewis and Clark*, Introduction.

³ Letter to Jefferson from St. Louis, Sept. 6, 1806.

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attending its discovery, was never used in the way its great patron, Jefferson, hoped it would be. He expected a vast fur trade to pass that way from the Pacific through the United States and believed also that a trans-Pacific commerce in products of the Orient might be associated therewith. The Missouri River furs did, indeed, take that route, but Columbia River furs and those secured along the Pacific from Alaska to California found their best market in China, while the silks, tea, and other oriental goods received in exchange were carried around Cape Horn to New York, Boston, and Salem.

The hostility of the powerful Blackfoot tribe for many years rendered the Missouri route unsafe for travel into the mountains, where was the best beaver country, and for this reason traders and trappers followed more southerly lines, finally uniting on that of Platte River as the most available. This branch of the Missouri was not navigable, except in its flood stage, but it provided an easy, gradual approach to the Rocky Mountains for pack trains and for wagons. As early as 1823 members of one of William H. Ashley's trading and trapping parties, operating from the upper waters of Platte River, discovered a remarkably low depression through the mountains. This was the celebrated South Pass, gateway to both Oregon and California.

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From South Pass it is but a short distance, over level sage barrens, to Green River which is a branch of the Colorado. Rocky Mountain traders soon established winter quarters in various "Holes," or deep, sheltered valleys of Green River, and some of them were ambitious to learn whether or not the river could be navigated to the sea. This was found to be impossible on account of the tremendous chasms through which this stream and its continuation, the Colorado, flow.

However, Green River headed near Bear River, an eccentric stream which flowed first far to the north, pointing the way to Snake River the southern main tributary of the Columbia, and then turned sharp to the south, ultimately flowing into mountain girt Great Salt Lake, the most impressive geographical feature of the trans-Rocky Mountain highlands. A knowledge of all these connections came incidentally to the trapping parties in the course of three or four summers.

As early as 1826 the successors of Ashley visited Great Salt Lake, and from that point Jedediah Smith made a heroic journey to California by heading southwest to the Gila and Colorado rivers and crossing the desert to San Diego. On his return in 1827 he conquered the Sierras by one of the several difficult passes, possibly the American River; but if he descended on

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the east side along Truckee River he failed to find the Humboldt and reached Salt Lake after a fearful ride over the unrelieved desert south of that river. In a few days Smith repeated the previous year's trip to California. This time, however, after wintering on the American River, he attempted to make his way north along the sea-coast to the Columbia and he actually arrived, completely destitute, at Fort Vancouver, in October, 1828, having been robbed by the Umpqua Indians of all but two of his companions and all his equipment and furs. Smith spent the winter at Vancouver as guest of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company, and in spring accompanied one of their trapping parties to the neighborhood of Spokane, whence he made his way southward to Snake River and thus back to his partners' camp. The next year Jedediah Smith, David Jackson, and William L. Sublette, the three partners, united in a memorial to the Secretary of War in which they explained how easy it was to cross the Rocky Mountains with wagons by the "Southern Pass." They urged the government to settle with England the ownership of Oregon and give American traders access to the rich fur trade which the British company had monopolized. Nothing was said of the California trade, or that of the mountains south of the pass, for these districts, lying below the parallel of forty-two had been assigned by the treaty

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of 1819 to Spain and therefore belonged now to Mexico.⁴

Several American trading companies, including the one just mentioned, were ready to challenge the Hudson's Bay Company in Oregon. Among them were Nathaniel J. Wyeth of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Captain B. L. E. Bonneville, with their associates. Both groups operated west of the Rockies, from South Pass, for several years beginning with 1832. Wyeth established Fort Hall, near Snake River on the route from Bear River to the lower Columbia, made his way down to western Oregon, carried on a losing trade against the British, and returned home after selling Fort Hall to his successful rivals, the Hudson's Bay Company. Bonneville traversed the basin of Salt Lake, the great inland empire between the Snake and the Columbia, and descended the latter river to a point below the Cascades. Being out-traded as completely as was Wyeth, he also gave up the enterprise and returned to his service in the United States army.⁵

The geographical results of Bonneville's activities

⁴ Cf. Dale, H. C., *The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific*, Cleveland, 1918; and *Sierra Club Bulletin*, XI, 1925.

⁵ In 1849 he was commandant at Fort Kearney on Platte River where he was interviewed by gold seekers of all descriptions on their way west. See biographical sketch, *Dictionary of American Biography*.

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were of some importance. Aside from a knowledge of Great Salt Lake, they included considerable information about the Great Basin and the eastern flank of the Sierras. One of his men, indeed, the redoubtable Joseph Reddeford Walker, in 1833 found a way from Salt Lake to the Humboldt, followed that river to the Sink, then entered California by a route not definitely known, but returned by way of the later well-known Walker's Pass.⁶ In a sense, therefore, the years of the early thirties saw a road opened to both Oregon and California. In each case, however, much experimentation would still be required to make it readily negotiable for wagons, which was necessary if emigrants were to pass freely from the Mississippi Valley to those distant countries.

Oregon was of special interest as being potentially American, though Great Britain under the treaty of 1818 (renewed in 1827) had rights of trade and settlement there jointly with the United States, while California belonged to Mexico. Hence, the first colonizing movement contemplated settling American farmers in the valley of Willamette River, south of the Columbia. To reach there it was necessary, after crossing South Pass, to steer for Bear River and Fort Hall, then traverse the tremendous Snake River desert to the junction of that stream with the Owyhee, cross the

⁶ Cleland, R. G., *California, the American Period*, pp. 86-88.

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Malheur, and proceed by Burnt River Valley, and Powder River, to the Grand Ronde. Leaving that romantic valley by a western pass, the Umatilla River provided an easy line of communication with the Columbia. From The Dalles rafts could be used to convey persons and equipment down the river to the Willamette, while cattle might be driven either over the mountains near Mt. Hood, or down the north side of the Columbia to Fort Vancouver, and crossed from there. Though this road was used regularly from the year 1836, when the Whitman missionary party crossed, it was not until 1843 that wagons were taken all the way to the Columbia. By 1846 the Mt. Hood road was available and a new road had been opened into Oregon from near Klamath Lake, so that the emigrants could drive their ox-teams all the way from the Missouri to the Willamette.⁷ Meantime, interest in California became intensified through reports of that country's sub-tropical charms coupled with a prevalent belief that it would soon be acquired from Mexico. A few settlers had already drifted in, some by a southern route from Santa Fé, others from Oregon, the Hudson's Bay traders having found a trail through the Siskiyou Mountains. But in 1841 an agitation in the western part of Missouri resulted in sending the John

⁷ These features of western history are conveniently summarized in Schafer, J., *History of the Pacific Northwest*, chapters VIII-X.

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Bidwell-John Bartleson aggregation of sixty-nine emigrants (sixteen of them women and children), westward along the Oregon trail. At Soda Springs one-half of the party, including all the women save one, and all the children, headed for Oregon via Fort Hall. The rest simply drifted westward across mountain wastes till they reached the Humboldt which they descended to the Sink. Turning south from there to Carson River, they followed it and Walker's River into the Sierras, and made their way through by the Stanislaus to the San Joaquin Valley where the starving and wretched wanderers recruited on wild game before proceeding to the ranch of Dr. John Marsh, at the foot of Mt. Diablo, where they arrived early in November.

Though the Bidwell party had thus covered, in six months, the entire distance from Missouri to California, they, no more than Walker or Jedediah Smith, had found a practicable road through the Sierras. Soon, however, they discovered Sutter's Fort, then recently established, on the Sacramento near the junction of the American River, which proved to be strategically placed for succouring emigrants coming by way of Oregon and also those who should arrive by the most available routes later explored from the Humboldt into California. One party, guided by Joseph R. Walker, in 1843 crossed by the way of Owen's River;

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another party the same year entered from the Klamath Lake country, making its way through the Siskiyou Mountains probably along the route already opened from Oregon and traversed that spring by an Oregon party led by Lansford W. Hastings. This Klamath and Pit River route constituted the western end of the "Greenhorn's Cut-Off" destined to gain such an evil notoriety in the first gold rush year.

It was in 1844, the year after the first great emigration to Oregon, that the Stevens-Murphy party took wagons all the way to Sutter's Fort, having crossed the Sierras along the route of Truckee River and Bear Creek, a branch of American River. This, when the gold rush began, proved the most practicable road into California though variants from it were also used. It is the route later followed by the Central Pacific Railway. The ill-fated Donner party of 1846 could have gone through safely by that route, on which they starved and died, had they not reached the mountains too late, after the passes were blocked with snow.

The activities noticed above gave rise to the road by way of Fort Hall, Raft River and Goose Creek to the Humboldt, as well as that running nearly due west from Soda Springs. There was made known also by Lansford W. Hastings the cut-off which bears his name around the south end of Great Salt Lake, then west by north over the desert to the main Humboldt

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River. After the Mormon pioneers of 1847 had traveled that route from Green River to Salt Lake, through Weber Cañon, the Hastings Cut-Off became fully available; but it was used by the emigrants of 1846, its natural difficulties causing the delay which proved so tragic to the Donner party. The Mormons, being encamped near the site of Council Bluffs, crossed the Missouri in that latitude and journeyed along the north side of Platte River to a point opposite Fort Laramie. From there they followed the Oregon trail to Fort Bridger, then turned south to Salt Lake.

Adding now to our trail map the Sublette Cut-Off, from the Sandy to Green River, and Myer's or Hudspeth's Cut-Off from Soda Springs to the Humboldt, we have an outline of the route to California, with its principal variants, at the opening of the gold rush era.

Mention must nevertheless be made of the topographical surveys of Captain John Charles Fremont whose well-known reports proved so powerful an incentive to emigration both to Oregon and California. Although, as western pioneers were ever fond of asserting, it is almost true that this "Pathfinder" found no paths the emigrants and traders had not marked out, yet he mapped the several routes, which in the circumstances was nearly as important a service as finding them. Besides, Fremont actually contributed

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knowledge of ways to improve the roads by means of short detours and furnished valuable notes on distances and camping places. His first journey, in 1842, took him only to South Pass from which point he returned part of the way along the north bank of Platte River. In 1843, after a detour to Salt Lake, he pursued the Oregon trail from South Pass by way of Fort Hall to The Dalles of the Columbia. From there he turned south, skirting the Cascades and Sierras to Pyramid Lake and Truckee River. He had designed to return east through the Great Basin, to find Humboldt Lake or River and to determine whether some great river—like the mythical Buonaventura or Multnomah River—actually flowed west from or near Great Salt Lake to the Pacific. He was belated, his supplies gave out, and he therefore decided to follow up Truckee River, break through the Sierras, and descend to the plains of California. This feat he accomplished in the dead of winter at a terrible hazard, reaching Sutter's Fort March 6, 1844. The return was partly by the Santa Fé route, and partly by the Oregon route, reached from Salt Lake. Fremont, on this journey, did not traverse the Humboldt Valley. In 1845 he found a way by which one could ride from Boiling Spring River on the Arkansas, directly through the Great Basin and arrive at Sutter's Fort in the course of thirty-five days, but his detailed report of that journey (and of his

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doings in California which followed) has never been given to the public.⁸

In the perspective of eighty-one years it seems as if the activities thus far described were merely preparatory for what was to come. The gold rush, at all events, imparted to the route a new meaning, as the journal now published helps to prove. The problem, from 1849 on, was not primarily one of finding a road, but of keeping alive and moving forward with wagons and stock, on a trail sometimes good, sometimes bad, where many thousands of others were likewise forcing their way along, grimly determined, by fair or unfair means, to win through to the goal. We have here, in short, the history of unorganized moving crowds, dominated often by a spirit of high adventure, but driven also by the gambler's hope of sudden wealth.

The concentration camp of the gold seekers was the west bank of the Missouri River for a distance of more than three hundred miles, from Independence (Kansas City) to the present Omaha or beyond. The most eager argonauts reached their selected camping place early to await the fateful day and hour for beginning the march toward the far-off, rose-hued land of gold.

The story of the overland rush to California in 1849, has been often told, not infrequently in print,

⁸The letter of January 24, 1846, to Mrs. Fremont, containing the above statement is in *Niles' Register*, LXX, p. 161.

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yet many of its fundamental features have proved elusive. The vastness and complexity of the terrain covered, the monotony of the mode of locomotion, the obstacles presented by the rivers, and by the steeper mountains; the exacting, often the distressing, problem, of finding water and grass for the steadily weakening teams on which everything depended; the discouragements of sickness, the compulsory abandonment of property, the parting with friends who turned back or died on the way; the constant anxiety about and frequent annoyance from Indians; the terrors of the hungry, parching, murderous desert: these made a complex of difficulties which none but the strong and resolute could surmount and the full force of which can hardly be apprehended in this age of luxurious travel appointments.

No regular census of the numbers who planned for the overland journey exists and estimates vary widely. Perhaps the most reliable are those based on the count of the wagons as they passed a given point like Fort Kearney or Fort Laramie. We are here concerned only with the central route, it being understood that a certain number, possibly 8,000, went by way of Santa Fé. Though the Platte Valley held two main trails, one on the south side of the river, the other on the north, both were in sight of the tally-keeper at Fort Kearney, while at Fort Laramie the two became one.

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The result of the count at Fort Kearney, checked by partial records at the several Missouri River ferries and by the recounts at Fort Laramie and at the upper crossing of the Platte, gives us for the season of 1849 a grand total of nearly 8,000 wagons. These were assumed to represent 25,000 to 30,000 people and 80,000 draft animals.⁹

The people came from all classes of American society in nearly every state from Missouri east, but especially from all points west of the Alleghenies. The newspapers mentioned Louisville, Cleveland, Richmond, Pittsburgh, New York, and Boston. The states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Iowa, furnished many emigrants. The mode of assembling was illustrated by the case of Wisconsin where teams started from Kenosha, Racine, Milwaukee, Waukesha, Janesville, and in fact all important and many insignificant places in the southern counties. Madison sent her contingent and in the lead region of the southwest Mineral Point, Dodgeville, Platteville, Shullsburg, Wiotia, Potosi, Beetown, were numerously represented in the groups large or small that concentrated on the Missouri in April.

It was estimated that the lead region of southwestern Wisconsin suffered the loss of one-fourth of its

⁹ Executive Document, 1st Sess. 31st Cong. Vol. III, pt. I, 1850. Serial No. 569, p. 225.

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population while property values fell to a fraction of what they had been, such was the rage for selling out and going to the gold mines. The names of William S. Hamilton, James R. Vineyard, Hans C. Heg, Count Haraszthy, Lucius Fairchild show that the movement seized on the state's leaders as well as the rank and file.

Most parties made partial preparations before leaving home. A typical case is taken from Madison, Wisconsin. Lucius Fairchild, destined later to be thrice chosen governor of his state, was a boy of seventeen clerking in his father's store, who caught the fever and determined, with his parents' consent, to go to California. He joined with a young blacksmith of nineteen, and a fellow clerk of twenty. They bought a wagon, equipped it with such supplies as were thought necessary, including a small stove, and bought three pair of oxen for draft. Lucius received as a very useful gift from his family a strong Chippewa pony which served him famously enroute. The boys were very proud of their long red wagon, snugly housed in, their strong capable cattle and seemingly adequate equipment of every kind for the long journey. One evening toward the end of March they invited some girl friends to drive with them, and the merry group in the "prairie schooner," with ox-whip cracking like a succession of pistol shots, paraded the streets of the state

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capital to the endless amusement of the citizens. Then, on the last day of March, they bade goodbye to friends and loved ones and started out, by the old Military Road, toward the Mississippi.

As far as Dubuque, where they crossed the great river, all went well. But learning that the roads through Iowa were very heavy due to wet weather, they decided to send the bulk of the load, with Lucius in charge, by steamboat to St. Joseph, while the others should drive through to that point with the lightened wagon. Arrived at St. Joseph they had become wise enough to buy another yoke of cattle, and also to lay in a number of articles before omitted which their brief experience on the road had suggested as desirable. They then crossed the river in company with teams from Madison and several other Wisconsin towns, moved out some twenty miles upon the prairie and set up camp preparatory to making final preparations for the start. A captain was chosen, and a group of teams from several Wisconsin towns, from Iowa, and from St. Louis agreed to travel in their company. Like other similar "organizations," this one did not hold together firmly. Organization was much more in evidence at the start of these overland journeys than it was at the middle or later sections of the trail. Still, the crowds being so great, it was usually possible for numbers of men to consult together, for trial juries to

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be impaneled when necessary, and for staging an execution in the rare cases of murder being committed.

The letters which young Fairchild wrote before leaving the frontier reflect the character of the assemblage massed along the Missouri, the activities of the men, impatient to be off, the state of the western markets, the danger from cholera, and the discouragements which were sending many back to the homes they had left so recently. His family had been very anxious about the danger of cattle starving on the plains. But mountain men assured him the trip could be made with safety. He pleased the home folk by writing that if they could not make California in a single season they would winter at Salt Lake and drive through the next spring. But they were hearing marvelous tales of quick fortunes made on the river bars and were exceedingly eager to reach the goal that year. Lucius had taken the cholera on the boat up from St. Louis but had recovered quickly, as had another Madison man who contracted the disease. Fairchild saw all types of men gathered at the frontier: hoodlums from Pittsburgh, uniformed dandies from Richmond who were no masters for green New Mexico mules, sturdy farmers from Illinois driving five to seven yokes of fine oxen to a wagon.¹⁰

¹⁰The Fairchild Papers are in State Historical Library, Madison, Wisconsin.

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Another man, writing from Independence, Missouri, as early as April 6, says: "At this time every state in the Union excepting Delaware and Texas is represented at this place by a delegation of emigrants to California. . . . The various companies, as fast as they complete their outfits are going into camp and accustoming themselves to the duties pertaining thereto previous to leaving the settlements." By May 10 it was reported from Platte City, "The California emigrants have nearly all left our frontier and gone forward on the plains." A newspaper correspondent writing from Savannah, Missouri, presents a clever analysis of the gold-seeking multitude, their character, hopes, equipment, and mistakes of preparation. The majority, he tells us, were young or middle-aged men and contrary to a widely held misconception, they belonged in large part to the moral and well-educated classes who were taking a good deal of wealth with them and seemed to be staking their all on the venture. Their teams and wagons had cost them about \$250 per man, three men joining in an outfit. The wagons were arranged for sleeping but most carried tents. "Sheet-iron cooking stoves may be seen strapped on to the stern of the wagons; sometimes, however, a sheet-iron 'gold-washer' usurps their place and occasionally a keg of whiskey. . . . The fancy of the b'hoys is displayed in their soubriquets and mottoes. One set

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is the 'Badgers,' another is 'Suckers,' 'Hoosiers,' &c: 'from Suckerdom,' or 'Hoosierdom.' One placard says: 'Ho! for California—if you get there before me, say I'm coming.' Another—ox-team—is 'The Antiroyal Fast Line—off this evening, positively,' and one is designated as 'Pilgrim's Progress—Traveling Edition.'" Other arresting names mentioned were "Live Hoosier," "Wild Yankee," "Rough and Ready" [a Shullsburg, Wisconsin, aggregation, the original of Rough and Ready Camp and town celebrated by Bret Harte], "The Enterprise," "Elephant," "Buffalo," and "Gold Hunter."

Several writers call attention to the almost universal failure of emigrants to provide the right kind of wagon for the overland journey. Almost invariably the vehicle was too heavy, despite the warnings which had been written by Oregon, California, and Salt Lake emigrants for half a dozen years. All overland parties in fact, through bitter suffering, had discovered the folly of starting out with heavy wagon and excessive load and this knowledge they had tried faithfully to impart to those who should come after them. "Beware of heavy wagons," says Peter H. Burnett, of the Great Emigration of 1843,¹¹ "as they break down your teams to no purpose and you will not need them."

¹¹ "Letters to the New York Herald," reprinted in *Quarterly* of the Oregon Historical Society, III, p. 418.

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Light wagons will carry all you want." Burnett recommended a load consisting of one hundred and fifty pounds of flour and forty pounds of bacon to each person, and he insists that "all heavy articles should be left, except a few cooking vessels, one shovel, and a pair of pot hooks."

As to teams, Burnett was an advocate of light, active oxen or cows. One ox, he declares, will pull as much as two mules "and in mud as much as four." He lavishes eulogistic periods upon that patient beast. "The ox," he says, "is a most noble animal, patient, thrifty, durable, gentle, and easily driven and does not run off. Those who come to this country will be in love with their oxen by the time they reach here. The ox will plunge through mud, swim over streams, dive into thickets, and climb mountains to get at grass, and he will eat almost anything."

Despite all that had been written, and published widely in the newspapers, it could still be said in 1849 that hardly one in a hundred started with the proper equipment—a light, well-made wagon and very light load drawn by strong, medium-weight oxen or by cows. One forty-niner, from Mineral Point, Wisconsin, wrote from the Rocky Mountains: "Almost every one who started with a large wagon had cut off a piece of it."¹² The Fairchild party did so. George Kellogg

¹²James Wasley, *Mineral Point Tribune*, Oct. 12, 1849.

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of Janesville, Wisconsin, tells of a man and his wife who in Bear Valley had a quarrel. They then sawed the wagon in two, made a cart out of each part, shared the two yokes of oxen equally and each drove a cart. "They had a divorce," he says, "without judge or jury or even a lawyer."

Property losses on the way were very large. One party abandoned a thousand dollars' worth of clothing. Many threw away flour, bacon, beans, "powder, lead, cooking utensils, trunks, stoves, axes, harnesses"; articles of furniture were dropped off early, the food packages last of all. But early or late, every pound of excess weight was finally got rid of. "As in a leaky ship, everything is thrown overboard that can possibly be spared for the sake of lightening up."

The emphasis which all witnesses lay upon the necessity of light loads for the beasts implies that human freight must have been thrown overboard along with family bureaus, hair cloth lounges, and four-poster beds. And, it is a fact, that most adults who crossed the plains performed the journey literally on foot. Sometimes a young and slender member of a family was seated upon the driver's perch, helping from that vantage point to urge forward the flagging teams. The sick, the very aged, and the toddling children might be carried in the wagon. But everyone who was able to do so plodded along on foot. It was not un-

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common in the Pacific states twenty-five years ago to hear from the lips of an aged man or woman this testimony: "I walked to Oregon in 1847, as a child of ten," or, "I made the trip to California on foot in '49, bull-whacking all the way."

In the first gold rush year, as may be supposed, very few entire families crossed, the companies being made up mainly of young or middle-aged men. These not only walked after the actual routine of travel commenced, but in a large proportion of cases they finally packed loads themselves from the necessity of lightening the wagons or in the frequent cases of teams giving out on the road.

Storms of wind and rain on the Platte were an experience common to overlanders in those parts. In 1849 such a storm overtook the pilgrims on May 29. It caused a stampede, the cattle drifting as if in a blizzard to distances of twenty or twenty-five miles. But the chief cause of distress to the first-year gold seekers was the cholera which attacked the companies on the lower Missouri and gave them no surcease until the upper crossing of the Platte was reached. Thereafter they suffered from the less deadly mountain fever.

Our author's account of the day by day difficulties of travel will prove adequate for the most part as the reader follows him along the Platte and Sweetwater,

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across the South Pass, by Sublette's Cut-Off and via the Humboldt to the Sink. But mere prose fails to convey the tragic quality of the experiences men had in traversing "The Desert," from the Sink to Truckee River, a distance of about forty miles. Joaquin Miller must have had in mind this particular feature of the road when he wrote, in Pilgrims of the Plains:

Then dust arose, a long dim line like smoke
From out of riven earth. The wheels went groaning by.
The thousand feet in harness and in yoke,
They tore the ways of ashen alkali,
And desert winds blew sudden, swift, and dry.
The dust! It sat upon and filled the train
It seemed to fret and fill the very sky.
Lo! dust upon the beasts, the tent, the plain,
And dust, alas! on breasts that rose not up again.

They rose by night, they struggled on and on
As thin and still as ghosts; then here and there
Beside the dusty way before the dawn,
Men silent laid them down in their despair
And died.

Emigrants in 1850 were spared the similar hardships of the Greenhorn's Cut-Off which in 1849 enticed perhaps one-half of the gold seekers. It ran northwest from a point on the Humboldt sixty miles above the Sink, crossed the terrible Black Rock Desert, and pointing toward Klamath Lake, joined the Pit River route through the Siskiyou to the Sacramento

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Valley. But, again unlike the forty-niners, they suffered terribly from the Indians along the Humboldt, as is shown by the experience of our author, whose admirable narrative gives so lifelike a picture of California travel in the second gold rush year.

John Steele, son of Alexander and Martha Loretta Steele, was born in Middleton County, New York, March 22, 1832, and was therefore eighteen when he entered upon the adventurous journey this book records. His mother dying when he was but one year of age, the boy had been reared mainly in the home of grandparents by whom he was given such schooling as farm boys of the period customarily received. An apt, industrious, and serious pupil, at the age of sixteen he was prepared to teach country schools but the California trip made an interlude in his career as a pedagogue. On his return from the West in 1853, Steele spent about two years in advanced study after which he taught in Missouri until the outbreak of the Civil War in which he took an honorable part as a soldier in an Illinois regiment. It was not until the fall of 1867, when thirty-five years of age, that he joined the West Wisconsin Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and began preaching. He held, successively, charges at Wonewoc, Kilbourn, and Prescott, Wisconsin; he spent seven years as a

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missionary in New Mexico, and returning, preached at Menomonie, Mauston, Montfort, and Ironton, all in Wisconsin. Broken in health, in the year 1894 he made his home in Lodi, Wisconsin, where he died October 6, 1905.

*During his years of retirement from the ministry, Mr. Steele engaged actively in literary work. A book entitled *The Schoolmates; or Mary Howard*, an epic of the war of 1861-1865, was published at Lodi, Wisconsin, in 1901. During the same year he brought out at Lodi, in pamphlet form, a book which had previously appeared serially from the same types in the *Lodi Valley News*. This was *In Camp and Cabin*, a record of his "mining life and adventure in California during 1850 and later," a work which by 1928 had become so rare as to suggest its reproduction, in connection with *Bidwell's Echoes of the Past*, in the *Lakeside Classics* series, Chicago.*

*The material reprinted in the present volume was also printed serially in the *Lodi Valley News*, the initial installment appearing April 8, the concluding one November 18, 1899. Tradition affirms that this work, like *In Camp and Cabin*, also was reprinted from the newspaper types in pamphlet form, but this opinion seems to arise from the confusing of the two books. At all events, an exhaustive canvass by Mr. John Thomas Lee of individuals and libraries sup-*

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posed to possess copies brought only negative results, and an advertisement in the Wisconsin Magazine of History offering a reward for the loan of a copy was equally fruitless. The original of the journal has been either lost or destroyed. Under these circumstances, considering the excellence of Steele's narrative of the overland journey to California, the Caxton Club is performing a valuable literary and historical service in reproducing it in permanent and elegant book form.

The editor's function in connection with the republication has been sharply limited. He has redivided the text into about one-half the former number of chapters, and has supplied short chapter heads in place of the long, detailed ones appearing in the newspaper. He has corrected obvious typographical errors and a few others due apparently to haste in composition; and eliminated some passages which the context proves were added to the journal at the time it was given to the press. The aim has been to get back as nearly as possible to the essential journal, made on the trail by the author entering each evening the record of the day's activities, achievements, and sufferings. If the literary form is rather too good to represent accurately such scribbled entries, by a weary and sometimes distressed young overlander of indifferent literary training, the fact can be ascribed to his care

INTRODUCTION

in correcting his own early work when he prepared it for the printer. Very few liberties have been taken with his revision. The notes were supplied by the editor.

In the year 1926 the editor secured, for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, a portfolio of fifty sketches of scenes and incidents on the Overland Trail in 1849. They were executed by some artist who traveled at least as far as Soda Springs with the Mounted Rifle Regiment, Colonel William Wing Loring commanding, which had been ordered to Oregon and made its way to Fort Vancouver before the close of that year. The artist's name is nowhere mentioned on the drawings themselves and the editor was obliged to engage in a long and intricate research to identify him.¹³ He finally concluded that the sketches were probably the product of the pencil and brush of Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Lindsay, of the Rifle Regiment. By the courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, owner of the originals, six of these drawings appear in the present work.

JOSEPH SCHAFER

Madison, Wisconsin.

¹³ See Schafer, Joseph, "Trailing a Trail Artist of 1849," in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, September, 1928.

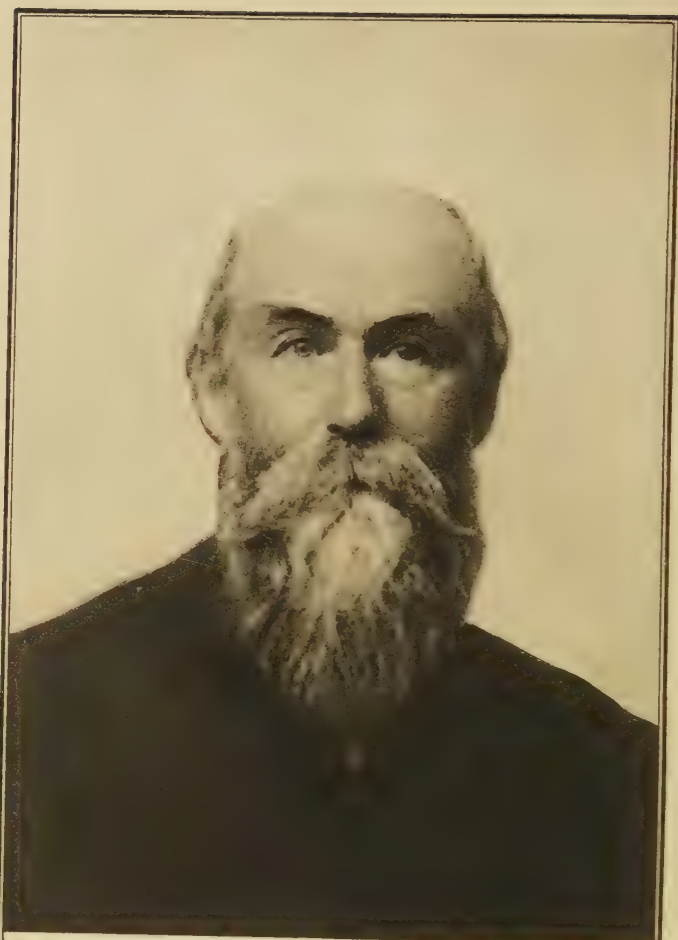
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NOTE: *The hitherto unpublished sketches reproduced in this volume were made in 1849, and, on good authority, are attributed to Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Lindsay, of the Mounted Rifle Regiment, Colonel William Wing Loring commanding. See Doctor Schafer's Introduction, p. xxxii.*



John Steele

FOREWORD

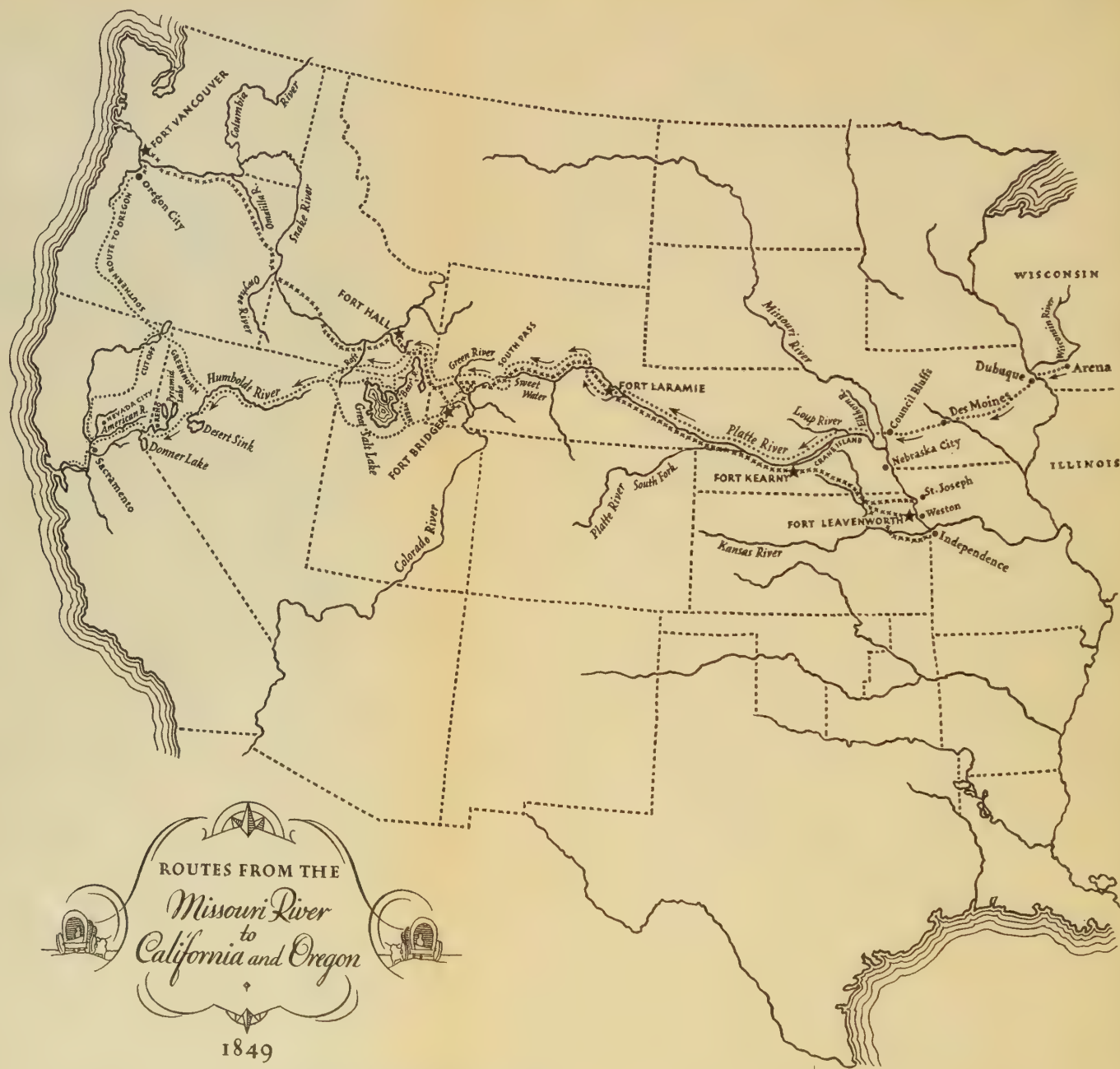
THE following pages contain the record of a journey made by the writer across the plains in 1850, from Wisconsin to the gold region of California. It is a description of the road and the incidents, just as they transpired on the way, being a diary written at the times and places mentioned. Although there were many thousands who made the trip that summer, there were few, if any, who possessed a definite knowledge of the road and, as a consequence, there was great suffering, so that the narrative has a melancholy cast.

The events described have touched and influenced a great many lives, and there were so many whose experiences were similar to those herein described, that they become an important part of our national history. And so far as the author is aware, no such minute and definite record of the journey and its events has ever been published.

J. S. [JOHN STEELE]

13 0° 12 5° 12 0° 11 5° 11 0° 10 5° 10 0° 9 5° 9 0°

45°
40°
35°
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ROUTES FROM THE
Missouri River
to
California and Oregon
1849

N.B. John Steele's party followed the arrow-marked trail in 1850.

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CHAPTER I

*Westward Ho! The First Stage, Arena to Des Moines*¹

DURING the winter of 1849-1850, when about seventeen years of age, I taught the district school at Gibraltar, West Point, Wisconsin. Bayard Taylor was then exploring the wilds of California, and his letters in the New York *Tribune* arrested my attention, gave me the "gold fever," and I resolved that just as soon as my school closed I would start for California.

My uncle, Samuel F. Steele, William Kingsbury, and I together planned an outfit for crossing the plains. In the latter part of March we met at Arena, Wisconsin, obtained four yoke of first-class oxen, prepared a wagon and stocked it with enough provision for about six months. Here, too, a similar outfit was prepared by each of the following trios: William E. Shimmans, Henry and John Callaman (brothers); and Thomas Dowson, Calvin Littlefield, and Burton Wait. We were nine men, three wagons, and twelve yoke of oxen.

¹Arena is a village located on the south side of Wisconsin River about forty miles west of Madison.

On Wednesday, March 27, 1850, the final farewells were spoken, and the journey to California was begun. The winter's snow lingered in places, but the sky was clear and the bright sunshine and balmy air somewhat relieved our saddened spirits, for we realized that we had bidden our friends a long adieu.

Leaving the valley of Wisconsin River we turned up Mill Creek, and late in the afternoon ascended the heights on the left, and stopped at a hotel kept by Frank Martel. The hotel was crowded, so Kingsbury and I slept in the wagon which stood by the roadside. The night was frosty but we rested well. Our partner, S. F. Steele, and his wife had gone by other conveyance to Mineral Point, where he intended to join us.

Another day's journey among lead mines and across a beautiful prairie brought us to Mineral Point. We put our team in the barn at William Terrill's hotel, and once more, and for the last time, slept in our wagon. Next morning, when the time came for us to start, we discovered that our wagon had been taken into the barn and, with the oxen, was now in charge of the sheriff. Surely, we thought, there must be some mistake; but we were informed that it was all perfectly clear and in accordance with law.

Our partner had been engaged in a law suit, which not only involved years of time but large expense, and only a week since the jury had found a verdict in his favor,

and he naturally supposed he had won the suit; so, leaving the case in the hands of his counsel, he prepared for his journey. But he was now informed that costs, to a large amount, had been charged up to him, and the attachment was simply for his interest in the California outfit. Kingsbury and I, as law-abiding citizens, might wait, perhaps for months, until the court could decide just what interest he had in the concern.

The amount was more than we could pay, and to await the decision of the court would delay us until too late to make the trip. Either horn of the dilemma held us, and so, unwilling to choose either of the two evils, we resolved to leave the whole affair in the hands of our partner and the sheriff, and look out for some other way of making our journey.

Kingsbury joined with William E. Shimmans and the two brothers Henry and John Callaman, and I agreed to pay all the expense of feed for the oxen, ferriage, etc., and at Council Bluffs add my proper proportion of provisions, and then possess an equal share in the outfit of Thomas Dowson, Calvin Littlefield, and Burton Wait. Fortunately for Kingsbury and me our satchels, containing most of our wardrobe, were at the hotel, and thus beyond the grasp of the law. My uncle's rifle was at a gun shop undergoing repairs; this was exchanged for mine, which was in the guarded wagon, and so, without infringing the letter or spirit of the law, we were once

more ready for the journey. And yet there were many things in our vehicle which we greatly regretted leaving behind, not merely for their value, but for the loving hearts and hands which had prepared them, and months afterwards, on the hot desert of the lower Humboldt, while wearing a cloth cap, I thought of a summer hat left hanging in that wagon.

At four in the afternoon we left Mineral Point. Kingsbury and I were not feeling quite as jubilant as when we entered the town but, upon the whole, I think we felt better than our partners who remained. At sunset we descended the steep bluff and stopped for the night on the east branch of the Pecatonica. Our changed conditions deprived us of our cozy cot in the wagon, so Kingsbury and I made ourselves as comfortable as a bed of hay in the barn would permit.

Saturday, March 30. A cold atmosphere and cloudless sky cheered our waking. With hearts more depressed than we were willing to admit, we partook of a cold breakfast, and at sunrise were on our way. Crossing the hills of the Pecatonica and its western branch, our road lay through a delightful prairie country, among new and beautiful farms, and late in the afternoon we put up at a hotel on the summit of a high prairie ridge, hoping to pass the first Sabbath of our journey in comfort and quiet. Most of the way, thus far, our journey lay through the richest lead region of Wisconsin, and every-

where, in village or country, the miners were the most numerous class, easily recognized by their wamus [jacket] and overalls of bedticking, among them an almost universal style of dress.

Sunday, March 31. Much as we wished to enjoy the Sabbath, it seemed less of a desecration to be on the road than at our hotel. The only sitting room served as a bar room, and I, for one, was glad to get out of the disgusting gang of tipplers which thronged the place. Some were farmers but most miners, who were accustomed to spend their Saturday evening and Sunday at this tavern. Years afterwards, when detained some days on business in the neighborhood, I saw a half drunken father, with loaded gun, pursuing his son and threatening to shoot him; and when the mother interfered she was promptly knocked down. This blighted family and two cases of delirium tremens which came to my notice, were a few of the fruits of that rum shop.

We were away at an early hour. The morning was bright, and I walked on at a rapid pace, admiring the nice prairie farms, with their long, straight lines of fence. When at some distance in advance of the wagons, attracted by the notes of the meadow lark, the first which for months had greeted my ear, I turned into a grove. The lark, singing and soaring skyward, was soon gone, the silence became impressive; seated by a rill which rippled through the grove, my thoughts ran back to

other Sabbaths and their associations; to the church where I was baptized, and the sweet rest of soul through reconciliation to God. Then came the compunctious thought that all was not so now. I could not altogether reconcile my conscience to the adventurous life that lured me on. It seemed the nearest way to competency, educational and social advantages, but it might be a mere waste of the time which should be devoted to mental and moral culture, and at a time when the mind and heart are susceptible to the deepest impressions, when external circumstances are liable to sway internal principle, and result in the triumph of the worst, rather than the best, in human life.

Then I remembered the story of my mother's life and death; leaving father and her four little children, and I, the youngest, but little over a year old. How earnestly she had prayed for us all, but especially for "baby"; and now "baby" was drifting out into an adventurous life. I had never been able to recall her form or features, but with all that I had been told of her beautiful life and death, the dreaming past had become more and more real, and it now seemed that her interest in me was just as earnest and real as, when dying, she commended me to God. In my journal I penciled the following lines:

Loving the bosom that pillowed this head,
 Sweet was the voice that spoke but to bless;
 Gentle the hand that my infancy led,
 Tender the warm-hearted, fervent caress.

WESTWARD HO!

Dreams have they been since that spirit departed—

Dreams? may the world never conquer their power

To quell each emotion by passion imparted,

And arm me with strength in temptation's dark hour.

The solemn stillness of the place emphasized my thoughts, and feeling the need of an infallible guardian and guide, I earnestly implored the protection of Almighty God.

In the meantime clouds obscured the sun. I rejoined the company, and passing the village of Fairplay, we descended to the Mississippi River nearly opposite to Dubuque. I shall never forget the first time, as from a bluff on its eastern bank, I gazed upon this great "Father of Waters." Here it is more than a mile wide, and of sufficient depth to float the largest vessels. About dark, as rain commenced falling for the first time, we pitched our tent.

Monday, April 1. Early this morning we crossed the Mississippi on a small horse ferry to Dubuque. As the rain continued and the roads were deep with mud, the wagons were hauled into a yard within the city and we took shelter at a hotel. Crowds of California emigrants thronged the city, and all day long waded the deep mire of the unpaved streets, apparently unconscious of the pouring rain.

Tuesday, April 2. Broken clouds and glimpses of sunshine gave promise of a fair day, and at 10 A.M. we

commenced the steep ascent west of the Mississippi. These bluffs abound in rich mines of lead. Slowly we climbed the slippery road, our patience cheered by the hope of good roads when we reached the level, open prairie said to be beyond. But the clouds returned and rain fell upon us all the afternoon. The prairie failed to fulfill our hopes, for though level, it had thawed, and the road seemed bottomless. Toward night we stopped, but the rain kept right on, the tent was pitched, supper prepared, and then, by permission, we took shelter in a neighboring barn. The next morning, rain still falling, we continued across the deep, miry prairie relieved in the afternoon by some low oak covered ridges, where, crossing a large creek, we camped near the pretty little village of Cascade.

Thursday, April 4. Another rainy morning, and another day's journey across the low, level prairie. In the afternoon, the storm changed to sleet and snow, adding to our discomfort, and thus night overtook us on the plain. From a farmer in the neighborhood, we obtained corn and hay for our teams, and then sought shelter on the lee side of a rail fence. Poles, which had been used during the day to pry the wagons out of the mud, were cut into firewood to cook our supper. The trembling tent gave us but little protection from the keen, north wind, and early in the morning we left our cheerless camp. In about four miles we were overtaken by a

WESTWARD HO!

furious snow storm in which we descended to the village of Anamosa, and crossed the Wapsipinecon River. Then ascending a high slope, in a forest of oak and maple, and passing the hamlet of Fairview, we struck across a beautiful level prairie. Stuck in the mud occasionally, as usual; but in the afternoon the clouds broke away, the sun shone out, the wind fell, and at sunset we were made happy by finding a hickory grove, where we pitched our tent by a small, clear brook.

Saturday, April 6. At seven in the morning, we hauled out of our beautiful grove and were soon wading the deep mud of the prairie. The air was cool and bracing, the blue sky, bright sunshine, and song of birds filled all overhead with cheer, and made us feel as though we too would like to go in that direction. About noon, we passed the village of Marion; its new and elegant buildings, and extensive view, make it a very gem of the prairie; and winding among some low, partially timbered ridges, we came to Cedar Rapids, on Red Cedar River, where we found comfortable rooms at the hotel. We had the impression that all, men as well as oxen, needed the benefit of the Christian Sabbath before launching westward into the bottomless fields of mud.

Sunday, April 7. A bright, spring day, made more pleasant by the earth's slight carpeting of green. The village, though small, possesses great promise in the abundant water power afforded by the river, but more

especially in the beautiful and well-arranged school house, where I attended preaching service and Sunday school. I saw but little of Dowson and Littlefield during the day, and when late the next morning they appeared, it was evident that they had just awakened from a drunken sleep. One carried a jug of whiskey, which, though Wait and I protested, they persisted in placing in the wagon.

It was after 9 A.M., when our team joined the other, and our companions were chafing under the delay. Ferrying Red Cedar River, we took our way across the prairie. Dowson and Littlefield, both under the influence of liquor, soon began a dispute and insisted that I should decide which was right. "No," said I, "leave that to the Callamans, they are not prejudiced, for or against, either of you; I may be." To this they agreed. Henry and John were called, the teams stopped, and in the presence of the company, each belligerent tried to present his case, and solemnly awaited the decision. "Boys," said Henry, "all this trouble came out of that two-gallon jug, and there is plenty more left; and the best way to bring the matter to a settlement, and see everything in its true light, is to break the jug." This speech caused the rest of us to smile, and Dowson, in a fit of anger, seized the jug, and before Littlefield could prevent, smashed it against the wagon hub. They acted sullen and morose the rest of the day, and I doubt if

WESTWARD HO!

they were ever afterward as friendly toward each other as they had been.

The day was cloudless and warm, and our road less muddy than usual. Passing some groves, which lay like clouds on the horizon, sunset brought us to the timber outlined course of a small creek, near a cluster of springs. Here we camped and the oxen feasted on the tender grass.

Tuesday, April 9. This being Dowson's day to drive, thinking it well to leave him and Littlefield to settle their difficulties alone, Wait and I planned a hunting excursion. Our camp was at the edge of a beautiful grove of oak, maple, and hickory, on the bank of a stream since known as Prairie Creek; and supposing that our road lay up the valley, we did not expect to deviate far, while hunting in the grove. In this, however, we were mistaken. The road turned southward, while we continued northward up the creek. Clouds obscured the sun, and we had no correct idea of our course; so we continued our hunting and captured a large duck, but the deer and grouse failed to materialize; at last, when it began to rain, we sought the wagon. Turning to the left we were soon on the prairie, but neither wagons nor road were in sight.

Late in the afternoon a snow storm burst upon us, and a freezing north wind so fastened the broad flakes to our wet clothes that, coming to a dead bur oak tree,

we kindled a fire and made an effort to thaw out. Finding a spring near by, we dressed our duck, and broiling it on the coals, ate it minus all seasoning, save hunger. Descending the bluff among decrepit-looking bur oaks, about dark we reached the broad lowlands of Iowa River; and passing several farm houses, at last found our company shivering in the tent at the edge of the timber.

The next morning we learned, by the settlers, that we were eight miles above the village of Marengo. At noon we ferried the Iowa River, but as we neared the border of the timber, the high north wind warned us not to venture out on the prairie; and, as we could obtain plenty of corn and hay for the teams, we turned again into the woods, and pitched our tent.

Thursday, April 11. This morning a pleasant flash of sunshine from the broken clouds lured us from the camp. Facing a keen northwest wind, we traversed a high rolling prairie, crossed Bear Creek about noon, and after a day's journey of eighteen miles, at sunset camped at Snook's Grove. We built a large fire before our tent, but the night was chilly and tedious; and at seven in the morning we were off for Lattimore's Grove. Twenty miles of ocean-like prairie, facing a strong wind from the northwest, which brought an occasional flurry of snow, not only gave a gloomy cast to the level country but emphasized the poet's inquiry,

Where dost thou linger gentle Spring?

WESTWARD HO!

We found the grove a beautiful, open woods, and while putting up our tent, the sun, as in mockery, smiled brightly for a moment, then sinking below the horizon, left us to night and the tempest. A large camp fire, merry songs, or cheerful conversation, failed to convince us that we were happy. Every topic was soon exhausted and, one by one, we crept into the tent, hoping in sleep to lose a sense of our misery.

Saturday, April 13. This morning the ground was covered with snow and, shrinking from the freezing wind, we remained at camp. This we were all the more willing to do, as a neighboring farmer offered to sell corn and hay for our teams. For some time food had been difficult to obtain and our oxen were beginning to feel the lack; now, while they were sheltered in the grove, we hoped to refresh them with food and rest. Finally, our neighbor informed us that he could let us have but little corn, but could furnish all the hay we wanted at one dollar a hundredweight. So he brought us a load, which was guessed at so much, and he received his pay, promising to bring some corn, but it never came.

Taking my rifle, I went out in search of prairie chickens, and following in the light snow the wagon track which wound through the grove, and down to the edge of a large marsh, I found where the hay came from. There was indeed, plenty, hundreds of acres, but it had been bleached by the winter storms, and this worthless

stuff he was cutting and selling to travelers at one dollar a hundred. We had our misgivings when we bought it, but our oxen had none; they would gnaw the ground, browse the elm, maple, and basswood branches, but turned in disgust from the "hay."

Sunday, April 14. Hoping to find food for our teams, we left camp at an early hour, crossing a succession of ridges, then through rich bottoms, and across the east branch of Skunk River. Ascending a high prairie ridge, which widened as we advanced until it became a level plain, about sunset we pitched our tent at the village of Newton: glad to obtain some corn and real hay for the oxen; and also grateful for the warm, calm, and spring-like day.

Monday, April 15. Seven A.M. found us on our way. About noon we descended some timbered ridges, and ferried the west branch of Skunk River; then by a series of gentle, wooded acclivities reached the open prairie. In the afternoon, as we approached Mitchell's Grove, a herd of elk crossed our road and all, except the teamsters, seized their rifles and gave chase. They seemed so near, almost within reach of our guns, but with our utmost speed they left us, and at a graceful swinging trot disappeared over a distant roll of the prairie. These are the first we have seen, but judging by the many horns scattered through grove and prairie, they must have been very numerous in the recent past. Camped in

WESTWARD HO!

Mitchell's Grove, and from Mr. Mitchell who, I believe, was the only settler, obtained some corn for the teams, and then built a large fire, by the light of which we cooked supper.

The next day we moved our camp to the timber, about a mile east of Fort Des Moines, and spent the following day in quest of forage. As a result, we resolved to remain in the valley of the Des Moines River until grass covered the uplands.²

²Stop at Des Moines, April 16. The Kellogg party "lay by for grass" from May 1 to 7, 1849, not far from Des Moines. The grass came earlier in 1850.

CHAPTER II

From Des Moines to Council Bluffs

THURSDAY, April 18. We ferried the Des Moines River at the Fort, which stood at the mouth of the Racoon fork, and consisted of two rows of low log houses, fronting either stream. As their warlike tenants were no longer needed, they had been converted into store rooms, and a flourishing village occupies the parade ground. Descending the river six or seven miles, we came to a number of beautiful farms. New log houses, straight rail fences, fields where rows of corn shocks were still standing; others, whose dark, smooth surface showed that the seeds of another harvest were already in the ground; and still others, green with a luxuriant growth of winter wheat.

Here we found abundant food for our teams, and, as the winter school had been dismissed, and it was not yet time for the summer term to begin, we were kindly permitted to occupy the school house at the edge of the forest. The school house was built of logs, and with the exception of the teacher's desk which was pine, I do not think there was a piece of sawed lumber in the building.

Floor, desks, seats, door frame and door had been split from basswood logs, and neatly dressed and smoothed into form with the axe. The door had wooden hinges and latch; two window spaces, into which frames covered with white cotton cloth were neatly fitted to keep out the wind, let in considerable light. A wide fireplace and chimney made of slats, interlaid with clay, gave opportunity for heating. A roof of oak shakes, held on with weight poles, completed the unique fabric. There was not a pane of glass, and scarcely a nail, in the entire structure; even the door frame was fastened with wooden pins.

A large, wooded island affords good pasturage for our teams, and owing to the water line, they are easily guarded, and we cross the west channel by means of a fallen tree. The woods abound with deer, wild turkeys, and other game; and the streams with waterfowl and fish—a veritable hunter's paradise which, during our short stay, we greatly enjoyed.

Some distance down the river we found the ruins of an Indian village, once occupied by the Sacs and Foxes, now in ruinous decay and, with their cornfields, overgrown with brush and briars. Near the village was a burial ground. At many of the graves stood posts ornamented and covered with outlines of men, animals, and birds: the sympathies of sad hearts, here expressed in sign language, with those who traced them soon to be forgotten. I walked leisurely around the village. Moss

had crept over the place where their fires had burned, around which the dusky families once gathered. I went down the deep, overgrown, willow-shaded path to the spring, which still murmurs its low monotonous music: but the miry earth betokened long neglect, and the cool, clear waters mingled, untasted, with the river.

Sunday, April 21. We are feeling quite at home with our kind and intelligent neighbors, and as our teams are doing well, and require but little attention, we have leisure for hunting, and consequently plenty of game. The weather has been delightful, bright birds, and blossoms on all sides, until the landscape seems a veritable Eden. This has been a day of rest from toil and care, and the Sabbath evening finds our entire company assembled at the school house. The day has been spent in writing letters, reading and singing, and this affords a good opportunity of presenting our company to the reader.

That man, about forty years of age, of muscular form with dark hair, blue eyes, broad brow and pleasant countenance is William E. Shimmans. He is a native of the Isle of Man, intelligent, upright, kindly of heart; the only married man in our company. His wife and family are at Arena, Wisconsin, and his love and devotion to them are manifest in the numerous letters he writes, and the tenderness with which he speaks of them in conversation. He was one of the pioneer farmers of Wisconsin, and is the Nestor of our band.

FROM DES MOINES TO COUNCIL BLUFFS

Associated with him are Henry and John Callaman, brothers, natives of Ireland. Perhaps I ought to say, Sir Henry, as he, being the older, will succeed to the title and estate of his father, should a case, now pending in the court of Chancery, be decided in his favor.³ After graduating at an English college, he studied medicine in France, and upon receiving his diploma as doctor of medicine, devoted seven years to practice in a military hospital in Calais, France. Then, with his brother John, who when a boy had entered the English navy, he came to the United States, and they are now making the tour of America. Henry is an accomplished gentleman, tall, with fair complexion, flaxen hair, and blue eyes; while John is the ideal sailor in manners and speech, short in stature, dark hair and eyes, weather-tanned complexion, and seeing the two together, none would think them brothers.

Last of their mess is William Kingsbury, a native of Rockford, Illinois; about twenty-one years of age, tall, manly, with brown hair, blue eyes, beautiful form and features; he has a cultivated mind, is a fine singer, his memory stored with the choicest gems of sacred and sentimental song. He is an adept with the violin, which in singing he uses as an accompaniment to a voice of wonderful power, compass, and sweetness. He is our

³It was so decided, and in the fall of 1851, he returned to Ireland and entered upon his father's title and estate.

good genius, enlivening the camp with goodfellowship, hope, and cheer.

Burton Wait and Calvin Littlefield are natives of some rural district in New York, about twenty years of age, light complexions, brown hair, blue eyes, tall, muscular, and no doubt, capable of great endurance. They are genial, jocular, good singers, and both play the violin fairly well; but for some reason never play with each other or with any one else, or as an accompaniment to singing, but rather independent, and oblivious to all music but their own. The other afternoon as I entered the school house, they sat side by side on the same bench with their violins, one repeating the monotonous strains of "Old Dan Tucker," and the other gliding through the wild mazes of the "Arkansaw Traveler." The effect may be imagined, but not told.

Thomas Dowson was born in London, England, came to Wisconsin but a few years since; age nearly thirty, slight in form and stature, fair to paleness, light hair and expressive blue eyes; nervous, inclined to give expression to his feelings, but jovial, witty, and withal a good singer.

Your humble servant, the writer, completes the list, and when our quartet is led by Kingsbury with his violin, it is the writer's privilege to assist with his flute.

Monday, April 22. We were aroused at the dawn by a loud thumping on the school house door, and a hoarse, angry voice vociferating, "Turn out! turn out!" And

FROM DES MOINES TO COUNCIL BLUFFS

before we had the time even to grasp our pantaloons, we were confronted by an old pioneer farmer, who, with frowning brow and uplifted hand, ordered us to drive our oxen out of his cornfield.

Owing to the abundant pasture on the island, we believed they would remain there unguarded. It was a case of misplaced confidence. In the night they had crossed the channel, broken through a high fence, and having satisfied their appetite, were wantonly overturning the shocks, and trampling the yellow ears into the earth. They were driven into the woods, the fence put up, our neighbor paid for the injury, and assured that for the future of our stay, the teams would be closely guarded.

We are now in the "Three River country," so named from three large creeks, known as North, Middle and South rivers, which from the west and only a few miles apart flow into the Des Moines; each with its line of heavy timber, and an intervening prairie with its rich undulating surface, though sparsely settled, promises ample reward for the labor bestowed.

Saturday, April 27. Our nine days at the school house had clothed the hills with verdure, and we felt there would be no risk in pursuing our journey; therefore at an early hour we left our pleasant resting place, which none of us can forget, and the cumbersome wagons again rolled out to the prairie road. After a pleasant day we passed the night at Lynn Grove, and the next day, when

crossing a series of broken ridges, we saw indications of extensive coal mines, coal in many places cropping from the steep banks. Early in the afternoon we camped by a small creek on the prairie.

Monday, April 29. This morning we passed the village of Winterset. Our road lay over a continuous prairie, and toward night we began to look for fuel with which to cook supper. Coming to a small creek we saw in the distance what, in the twilight, appeared to be willows, and camped. Wait, Littlefield, and I set out for a supply of firewood. After going about half a mile the supposed willows towered into large cottonwood trees, only the tops of which had been visible. It seemed over two miles to the timber; and each of us, gathering all the dry branches we could carry, reached camp about an hour after dark.

A threatening storm hurried us with our supper, which was hardly finished when a flood of rain drove us into the tent. Spreading our blankets on the ground, we were scarcely asleep, when away went the tent on a sudden gust of wind. Some took refuge in the wagons, but there was not room for all; so Shimmans, Kingsbury, Wait and I, after groping around until we found the tent, hauled the wet cloth over us and slept as soundly as the circumstances would permit.

Tuesday, April 30. The rain was over but a chilling wind made us shiver in our damp clothing as we

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gathered around our little camp fire and prepared breakfast. About twenty-four miles over a succession of prairie ridges, brought us to the Watawa River, where we camped in a beautiful grove; and the next day, after eighteen miles of continuous prairie, we found another fine grove on the banks of the Nodaway River,⁴ where we pitched our tent. Near the road we found a rude log shanty, bearing over the door the familiar sign, GROCERY. Hoping to obtain some cheese, crackers, fruit, etc., Kingsbury and I called, but the proprietor informed us that wines, liquor, and tobacco were his only stock in trade. It seemed a very innocent affair, but when several companies of California emigrants camped in the vicinity, that shanty became a center of attraction;

There was a sound of revelry by night,

and we were glad when the dawn permitted us to get away. The incident, however, illustrates the enterprise and devotion of men to evil, for this man, as many others have done, died a martyr to his bad business, being shot a week later in a drunken row.

After a prairie journey of fifteen miles, early in the afternoon, we entered Connel's Grove. The place was so inviting that we put up our tent in a deep, wooded glen,

⁴Nodaway River rises in Cass County, Iowa, showing their course from Des Moines to have been southwest on a line toward Council Bluffs.

on the bank of a rippling brook. We begin to appreciate our oxen; they walk about the same distance in a day as do horses, and coming into camp hungry and tired, when unyoked they feed rapidly, and then lie down to rest and chew the cud. Toward morning they arise, and lay in another supply of dewy grass, and then take another rest. Let them have plenty of grass and water, and they keep in good condition, and render faithful service. After the day's journey they are not inclined to stray, hence require but little attention.

Friday, May 3. This morning a white frost sparkled on the leaves and grass, and many of the young flowers bowed their heads as in death. Reluctantly we turned from the timber, to face the chilling northwest wind on the prairie, and having traveled about twenty miles, at sunset we camped on the east branch of the Nishnabotha River.⁵

Saturday, May 4. On both sides of the river opens a wide expanse of rich prairie, through which the stream, in all its windings, is marked by a broad line of oak, hickory, black walnut, and cottonwood trees. About 10 A.M. we forded the river and Kingsbury and I visited the ruins of an Indian village, from which we ascended to the Indian cemetery, on a high mound west of the river. It contains a great many graves, the later ones

⁵The Nishnabotha River rises in Carroll County, Iowa, and joins the Missouri above St. Joseph.

NODAWAY MILL



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indicated by posts painted in various characters, similar to those we found near the Des Moines; and the entire cemetery is inclosed with a fence of Indian construction, which like their wigwams near by, is falling into decay. The unsightly ruins of these abandoned homes, and the vain effort to protect the graves from desecration, are touching reminders of the race which occupied all this wide continent, but now is fading away in the far West. Their fate seems an accusation which calls to heaven against the treatment which the ignorant and needy have received from their, so-called, Christian brothers.

Following a trail directly west, probably eighteen miles, over the prairie to Mount Scott, a Mormon settlement, we found the first dwelling houses or cultivated land we had seen since last Monday; and yet there are no lands better adapted to farming than those we have traversed in the last seventy miles.

Sunday, May 5. This morning we moved our camp five miles, to the west branch of the Nishnabotha River, and rested in the shelter of the woods. The day was delightful, and with violin and flute, we enjoyed an afternoon of sacred song.

Monday, May 6. Sunrise found us on our way, crossing great rolls of the prairie; each valley had its willow outlined creek, and all clothed in the verdure of spring. At Silver Creek was a pleasant settlement, dwellings near the creek, and the newly fenced farms on the

gradual slopes of either side. At sunset we camped at Key Creek, where a branch of willows supplied us with fuel.

Tuesday, May 7. A sunrise of deepest gold upon the hills. In about nine miles over high ridges, down long, winding ravines, and gullies, we reached the broad valley of the Missouri River. From a high, clay bluff, I looked over the wide expanse. Dark lines of timber marked the course of streams, which in sluggish silence found their way to the river, or lost themselves in the large ponds which reflected the deep blue of the sky; the rich green of spring covered all the ground and festooned the trees; while away in the distance lay the great Missouri River, so muddy that it looked like a well-traveled wagon road after a rain.

On the plain appeared many little villages of white tents, generally arranged in circles, with the Stars and Stripes proudly floating in the center; wagons, with white covers, some at rest by the tents, others in long, moving lines; vast herds of horses and oxen, mingled with shouting herdsmen, animated with teeming life the natural beauty of the scene.

We moved about two miles into the plain, camped near one of the white villages, and turned our oxen to mingle with the thousands around; but when too late to remedy the evil, we regretted the selection of our camp. Besides the ground being miry and wet, we had no good

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water, and there was no firewood within a mile. We passed a cheerless night, and as soon as the dawn enabled us to find our teams, removed to the nearest timber, a line of large cottonwoods on Mosquito Creek, a sluggish stream along which a great many people were encamped.

At noon, by previous appointment, a meeting was held, a company organized, named the Wisconsin Blues; articles of agreement signed, stating the conditions of membership, as to wagons and teams, and pledging to each other mutual aid and protection during the journey to California. Officers were elected consisting of captain, lieutenant, first and second sergeants.

Thursday, May 9. This forenoon I visited St. Francis, a village of low log houses, on the east bank of the Missouri River. At the town, and for several miles above, the river is constantly cutting away the bank, and making a deposit on the opposite side; the age of which may be determined by the comparative height of the trees and bushes.

Seeing a band of Pawnee Indians pass through the street, down into the timber, one of whom, a few steps in advance, carried a large dog, curiosity induced me to follow the strange procession. They kindled a fire near the fallen and bleached trunk of a large cottonwood. Then the company, men and women, about fifteen in all, gathered around the fire; the dog was brought into

the circle, and two young men ran a simple overhand knot on a long thong, slipped it over the dog's head, and choked him to death. Then laying him on the fire the hair was singed, and nicely scraped off. He was then cut in slices, broiled on the coals. Thus cooked he was served on the log, around which the Indians gathered, kindly inviting me to join them in the feast and apparently disappointed at my refusal. It was probably a religious service, for when I refused to join with them, one pointed upward and repeated, "He sees, He sees."

Saturday, May 11. The weather continues delightful, and each day brings large accessions of emigrants. They come from all parts of the Union, but principally from Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. On reaching this place, they generally organize companies of sufficient strength to travel safely in any part of the Indian country. But few, if any, have yet crossed the Missouri River, under the impression that there may not be sufficient grass; and some are waiting for supplies by boat from St. Louis.

Sunday, May 12. Another bright Sabbath, but there is little here to remind us of the sacred day. No doubt among the vast multitudes on this plain, there are many devout souls, but to some, it is evidently a day of dissipation. At a meeting of the Wisconsin Blues, called this afternoon, it was resolved to cross the Missouri River at the Mormon Winterquarters, a place about twenty

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miles from our present camp, on the sixteenth instant. This definite arrangement enabled those who desired to change their camp to move in the right direction.

Monday, May 13. This morning I went to Kanessville Landing to obtain a supply of provisions, and as the boat had not yet arrived, though hourly expected, I remained until late in the afternoon, and then returned to the camp on Mosquito Creek. I was not surprised to find the wagons gone, for we had intended to move to the bluffs, in the direction of the Winterquarters, hoping to obtain better water. But as I lingered, a man came by driving a yoke of our oxen. I inquired, "How do you happen to be in possession of that team?" He replied, "Three men camped here, got into a quarrel, separated, and sold out; and I bought this yoke of oxen." "Have you any idea where they are?" I asked. "Not the least; guess they're in Kanessville,—at least they took their things up there, except some things they said belonged to a fellow down at the Landing; which they left with some men camped near them; and they've gone in the direction of the Winterquarters."

And so the unwelcome fact came out. In my absence the quarrel, separation, and sale had been accomplished; they had gone, and left me stranded by the way. This morning my prospect for the journey was as bright as any on the road. I had met the expense, according to agreement, paid for ferriage and feed, and it only

ACROSS THE PLAINS IN 1850

remained to put my quota of provisions in the wagon, and go on rejoicing to California. But before sunset, that which at sunrise seemed so solid, had gone like a dream. As the night came on, a company of emigrants kindly gave me food, and the shelter of their tent. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

CHAPTER III

In the Indian Country. Storms and Quicksands

TUESDAY, May 14. This morning I set out hoping to join some other company, but after visiting many camps, and wandering about the flats nearly all day, concluded that this, in my circumstances, was a vain hope. I sat down on the bank of the river to study the situation, and consider what to do. I could not make up my mind to abandon the journey after coming thus far; but with a strong, unshaken constitution, a good rifle, and a knowledge of its use, although I knew it to be a rash undertaking, I resolved to hunt my way across the plains and mountains, independent and alone. This being my decision, I wanted to find Shimmans & Co., that I might obtain the things which had been left with them, and so bent my steps in the direction of the Winterquarters. On the road near Kanessville I met Mr. Littlefield; he was on horseback, with his fiddle under his arm. I wanted to speak with him, but he shied around me, and a bow of mutual recognition was all that passed between us as he galloped by.

Night overtook me as I wandered over the bluffs above Kaneshville. My road, only a recent wagon trail, in the darkness was difficult to follow, but clambering up steep ascents, pressing among thorns and briars, groping through bogs and sloughs, about midnight, I descended a ravine and came suddenly into the camp of the Wisconsin Blues. Mr. Shimmans kindly welcomed me into his tent, where I found rest and protection from the chilly dew.

Wednesday, May 15. I spent this day at camp, preparing a knapsack, and arranging my clothes and ammunition for the journey. In the evening I wrote several letters, for, when I cross the Missouri River, Fort Laramie, over five hundred miles distant, will be my first post office.

Thursday, May 16. At daybreak the hum of human voices, and the murmur of preparation arose along the ravine; breakfast was soon over, the tents rolled up and stowed away, and at sunrise the Wisconsin Blues left their camp, and filed in a long line to the ferry, there to cross the Missouri River, and pursue their journey. I returned to Kaneshville, now Council Bluffs, to mail my letters, carrying a large package from the various members of the company with whom I had hoped to travel, but to whom I was compelled, this morning, to say "goodbye."

Procuring a quantity of hard bread, dried beef, salt,

IN THE INDIAN COUNTRY

pepper, etc., I returned to the ferry, and about sunset crossed the river to the Mormon Winterquarters, and using a vacant cabin for a tent, kindled my lone fire and prepared supper. The excitement of the busy day had gone, and a strange feeling of loneliness oppressed me. Two years ago this day, I left my home in New York with the boyish ambition of achieving success in the great West. Memory recalled my dear ones, the friends and associations of the past. I had crossed the bounds of civilization, and in my lone journey over plains and mountains, through deserts and forests, the fangs of some wild beast or the vengeful arrow of the Indian, might lay my bones to bleach in the sun and rain, while no friend would ever know my fate.

As night gathered, the darkness made more visible by the glimmer of distant camp fires, the murmur of the river, blending with the sigh of the wind, I sat by the fire, as hour after hour passed away, trying to shake off the feeling of depression, and look with hope into the mysterious future. At last commending myself to the protection of God, I sunk into restful sleep.

Friday, May 17. This morning I took a ramble around the deserted ruins of the Mormon Winterquarters. The surroundings are beautiful, grass and flowers cover the smooth surface of the prairie, which rises with gentle slope from the river, until it forms a high ridge. On this slope, near the river, stand the unsightly ruins of about

six hundred log houses, in which the Mormon emigrants spent their first winter, while on their journey to the valley of the Great Salt Lake.⁶

About ten in the forenoon, I shouldered my knapsack containing my scant wardrobe, some pilot bread, dried beef, ammunition, a quantity of paper for my journal, a small pocket Bible, a gift from my sister, and sundry small articles. My blanket was neatly rolled and strapped on top, over which was a light frying pan; the whole weighing not more than thirty pounds. A brace of pistols, hunting knife, and tin cup attached to my belt; rifle in hand, I started back over the ridge on the emigrant trail for California.

The cloudless sky and refreshing breeze, seemed to dispel the depression of the preceding night, and pacing merrily along, in about seven miles I unexpectedly found the Wisconsin Blues in camp. They had stopped for the purpose of reorganizing the company, few of the officers elect being present; some of the original company had fallen out and remained behind, and there was also a considerable number who had joined on the way to the ferry, who had not been formally recognized. At the solicitation of Mr. Shimmans, I placed my knapsack

⁶The Mormon "Pioneers" started from that place for Salt Lake, under Brigham Young's leadership on the 15th of April, 1847. *Clayton's Journal*, 124. They followed, and in part opened, the route our author traversed as far as Fort Laramie where they crossed over to the Oregon Trail.

in his wagon and concluded to travel with the company until we had passed the Pawnee's country, as they were said to be on the war path.

An inspection was here made of the teams, wagons and supplies. Each wagon was found in suitable condition for the journey, with the stated supply of provisions, and to each not more than four persons. With this necessary preparation, they all signed articles of agreement, solemnly pledging themselves to assist each other in case of loss of team, wagon, provisions, or in sickness or accident. The promise was, no doubt, given in good faith, but it was not long until the day of trial told how easily, by some, it could be broken. Hiram Furry was elected captain, William Kingsbury lieutenant, Gay Hayden and I. J. Hughes, first and second sergeants. The wagons were then arranged in four divisions, seven in each, that they might alternate in taking the lead, and all have equal advantages on the road. At dark, the twenty-eight wagons were drawn into a circle, and chained together, forming a corral into which the oxen were driven, the tents being on the outside. The sentinels then took their places, but it was near midnight ere slumber had quieted the camp.

I was surprised to find with the company my former partners, Dowson and Wait. After the departure of Littlefield, Hiram Furry had joined them. They acknowledged their obligation to me, but simply expressed

their inability to meet it, and thus the matter ended. I do not think any wrong against me was intended, but after the hasty action was consummated, as often happens in such cases, they found it impossible to be just.

Saturday, May 18. Last night there fell a gentle shower, but the morning was fair, and at eight the company moved out upon the trail. Most of the wagons had five yoke of oxen, and as they ascended a high roll of the prairie, and filed along the ridge, they presented an interesting appearance. Early in the afternoon the corral was formed near a cottonwood grove on Papillion Creek, a distance of eleven miles, and the next morning, after nine miles' travel, and ferrying the Elkhorn River,⁷ we camped on its western bank.

Monday, May 20. Last night the detailed guard of the camp suddenly sickened and I took his place, going on duty at eleven o'clock. Rain had just begun, when with the dignity of soldiers Mr. Wait and I, rifle in hand, marched to the entrance of the corral, and received the countersign from Sergeant Hayden. It was Wait's duty to guard the narrow entrance of the corral, while I, as guard of the camp, paced back and forth around the outer circle of the tents. I had walked my rounds but a short time when a tempest swept over the camp, accompanied with thunder, lightning, and torrents of rain. It

⁷ There was a commercial ferry at the Elkhorn, charge for team and wagon \$2.25. Some parties improvised raft ferries.

continued about an hour, and aroused most of the company. The incessant flashes lighted the camp, and I noticed that the oxen, frightened by the storm, occupied less and less space in the corral, and going around toward the entrance, saw a number of them outside, and driven before the wind.

Raising an alarm, with the assistance of several men, they were brought into the corral. By this time the storm was nearly over, and with lanterns, search was made for the missing guard. He was found under a wagon at the sheltering lee of a tent, rolled in his blanket, and sound asleep. Unceremoniously waked, a dozen voices charged him with being recreant to his trust; and the sergeants threatened to put him on guard the following night. Calmly facing the crowd he replied, "Put me on guard any number of nights, but don't make a fuss." The thought of his willingness for guard service, and how comfortable he made it, provoked a laugh, and turned the affair into a jest. Drenched with rain, I was glad when the dawn brought the relief guard, and I was permitted to dry my clothes at a camp fire. The guards were arranged in three watches; the first having charge from whatever time the train goes into camp until eleven at night; the second from eleven until four; and the third from four until the time for leaving camp.

The sun soon warmed the air and as we turned from among the trees all were impressed with the ocean-like

level before us, and many exclaimed, "We are now on the plains." In the afternoon we neared a line of timber on our left, which marked the north bank of the Platte River, and about sunset formed the corral near a small lake, in a grove of large cottonwood trees.

Tuesday, May 21. Our road lay near the Platte River; the soil, though sandy, bears luxuriant grass. Large numbers of Pawnees from their village on the south bank came to us begging for food, but more especially for whiskey. I went out to examine a large heap of earth about eighty rods north of the river. While seated upon it, an old Indian, to whom the others paid special deference, approached and told me in broken English that this was the grave of one of his people and I must not sit upon it. Stepping aside, with the remark that I did not know it was a grave, and that graves should not be dishonored, he seemed pleased, and said he had been in the land of the white men and learned to speak their language. As he seemed communicative, I asked him, "Have your people always lived here?" He said, "No," and I learned that, according to his idea, they came from a distant land and had once been a great nation, but falling under the displeasure of God, there were only a few left. I asked him, "How did your people displease God?" He seemed embarrassed and when I repeated the question, turned away. We camped on the east bank of Shell Creek where some cottonwood trees supplied us

with fuel. The Indians remained among us until dark, when they retired to the opposite bank of the creek and camped. Their presence caused the posting of a strong guard.

Wednesday, May 22. As we left camp, many of the Indians came to shake hands, in token of friendship, which manifestation received but little credit for sincerity. It, however, gave me another opportunity of talking with their leader, who said their tribe was at war with the Sioux, against whom a large war party would start as soon as the grass was tall enough to hide in. This, without his being aware of it, was valuable information to me to guard against those war parties. Our trail lay near the Platte, on a plain of deep, rich soil, and at sunset, finding a pond of clear water not far from the mouth of Loup River, where the city of Columbus now stands, we camped and a pile of driftwood on the river bank supplied us with fuel.

Thursday, May 23. Last night I again volunteered as sentinel, going on duty at eleven o'clock. The night was calm, the whole vault of heaven radiant with stars, but soon after midnight a dark, portentous mass came moving down from the west, its approach signaled by lightning's glare, and the thunder's deepening roll. The oxen were becoming uneasy and I passed around to assist the guard of the corral. Perfect calm lay over the sleeping camp, and we hesitated to arouse the company for a

mere thunder storm. Suddenly, with a tremendous swoop, it burst upon us; nearly every tent was swept from its fastenings, and the flood of rain which followed drenched the unfortunates whose bed clothes whirled in the wind. In fact, in our exposed position, we found it necessary to hold on by the grass to prevent being blown from our place at the opening of the corral.

Fortunately the hurricane lasted but a few minutes, though the rain continued more than an hour. Of course we were blamed for not giving timely warning, but the fact that neither of us had ever witnessed such a storm was our excuse. At daybreak the clouds partially cleared away, and soon sunshine stole like smiles across Nature's cleanly washed face. Gathering up the scattered bedding, cooking utensils, etc., immediately after breakfast we moved up to Loup River, and commenced ferrying the wagons across on a raft made of cottonwood logs, flattened, and put together with cross bars fastened with large wooden pins.⁸

The river was over three hundred yards wide, with a swift current, and a strong breeze blowing down stream made it impossible to effect a landing on the opposite

⁸One month earlier the Baker party made such a raft at the Elkhorn. That party forded Loup River, as did the Mormon pioneers in April, 1847. But their crossing was about two days' farther up the river. *Clayton's Journal*, pp. 85 and 101. For a detailed map of the road see Turnbull's *Travels, Proceedings*, St. Hist. Soc. of Wis. 1913, p. 158.

bank without drifting on a soft, quicksand beach. To obviate this difficulty a line was fastened to a snag which lay in the river, some distance above, and as the raft was pushed mid-stream, a man with the line swam from the snag to the raft; then several men grasped the line, and hauling the raft against the current, it was safely landed on the western bank. By repeating this, wagon after wagon with its precious freight was ferried over and drawn out into a deserted Pawnee cornfield near a grove of large cottonwood trees.

In the afternoon the oxen were brought and with considerable difficulty driven into the river. The leaders swam out and stopped on a dangerous quicksand bar. Three boys, J. Black, R. Lemon, and I, stripped off our clothes and swam out to dislodge them. Crossing the lower end of the bar, which was under water, we tried to drive the leaders into the channel. The great herd was crowding behind, and soon the wild lowing mass started directly for us. We led them toward the main channel, but we were quickly in deep water, with the whole herd between us and the shore. The men on the river bank, with frantic voices, warned us to keep in advance to prevent them trampling us under their feet. And so we struck out for the western shore.

At first I doubted my ability to swim so far in such a swift, rough current, but my companions were excellent swimmers, so falling in their wake and trying to keep

stroke with them, all of us, urged on by the loud breathing of the oxen, indicating how closely they followed, we soon made the trip. However, we did not care to swim back for our clothes, which were kindly sent over on the raft. Most of the wagons were brought over, and at night large fires were built, around which the men stood and dried their clothes.

Friday, May 24. At daybreak the ferrying was resumed, and at 8 A.M. the wagons were all safely over. The train then followed up Loup River on a somewhat muddy trail about sixteen miles, and camped on its bank. The next day, following up the Loup, we encountered a few sand ridges, but the road was generally good, and at sunset we camped near the river in a large cottonwood grove where we spent the Sabbath.

Monday, May 27. Sunrise found us under way. In a few miles we turned from the river westward, across a wide plain; then among sand ridges, where the wagons moved slowly on the soft road. Noon came, but finding no water, we kept on; night overtook us, and still no water. But the tired teams must rest, so the guards were called, and the oxen unyoked. The poor animals, as if in despair, lay down. All, men and oxen, were alike suffering with thirst. When, in the morning, we left Loup River, we had no idea that some forty miles must be traversed before again finding water, but such was the painful fact. Some put up their tents, but most spread

their blankets on the sand and tried in sleep to forget their thirst.

Toward morning, the oxen, rising to their feet, by their uneasiness seemed to insist on hunting a drink; so the guards aroused the camp, and with early dawn the train was moving, and all except the drivers deployed in search of water. But it was nearly noon when the train reached Prairie Creek; so named from the total absence of timber.

This forenoon, among the clay ridges north of the creek, our squad alarmed a large village of prairie dogs. Running to the entrance of their burrows, and sitting on their hind feet, they set up a shrill barking, and at our approach dropped out of sight. One that we shot was a light brown, larger than the gray squirrel, but in shape like the woodchuck, short tail and ears; and with shallow cheek pouches. But we were surprised to see small birds, resembling owls, go into these dog dens, as also did some prairie rattlesnakes, with which the place was infested. Birds, beasts, and reptiles in the same den; a strange affinity for such a trinity. How the family harmonized I do not know.

From Prairie Creek, far over the plain, we could see a line of timber, toward which we traveled during the afternoon, and at sunset formed the corral on the west bank of Wood River, near its junction with the Platte, at the lower extremity of Grand Island. Our camp is in a

beautiful place, and the farmers in the company speak of this, as a farming country, in highest terms. But first the intrusive white man will dispossess the Indian whose home is by these streams. How much better to Christianize and make him a useful citizen.

We have hardly reached the region of buffalo; but deer, antelope, and prairie chickens are plentiful, and when there is opportunity to put out set lines, we have abundance of fish. Thus far I have been very successful as a hunter, taking more game than I needed, and having much to give away, so that my store of dried beef is intact; but the diminution of my hard bread warns me to push on to Fort Laramie, where I may obtain more. I therefore spent the early part of the night in copying a guide which I borrowed, hoping it might be of some use in giving the distance between watering places.⁹

Wednesday, May 29. Our road lay near the Platte, the day was very pleasant, the train made about twenty-three miles, and camped near the north channel of the river. I spent most of the day on Grand Island. It is about three miles wide, and said to be forty miles long; with the exception of a prairie in the center, it is well

⁹Probably the *Mormon Guide Book* (Pratt's), pronounced excellent by Major Osborn Cross of the Mounted Rifle Regiment in 1849. *Oregon Expedition*, p. 70. It resulted from the Mormon exodus of three years earlier. William Clayton had devised a Roadometer which he attached to a wagon wheel, thus enabling the company to compute distances with considerable accuracy.

timbered with cottonwood. The main river flows on the south side, while on the north are numerous small channels not difficult to ford.

In the evening I prepared my outfit for an early start, and asked the morning watch to wake me when he went on duty. As this was to be my last night with the company, Shimmans, Kingsbury, and I sat by the camp fire until a late hour, and many were the conjectures when and where we would meet again, but neither seemed reconciled to my going.

Thursday, May 30. When the guard waked me, a crimson belt on the horizon signaled the approaching day. Breakfast was soon over, and shouldering my knapsack, I bade my most intimate companions goodbye and started for the road. Shimmans and Kingsbury, from whom I had received many favors, followed, urging me to remain, at least, a few days longer; others of the company gathered around, and when they understood my purpose, declared that under no consideration should I go on alone. Their kindness was a perfect surprise. I had formed an intimate acquaintance with several of the company, but until that hour was not aware that I had so many sincere friends. Yielding to their solicitation I concluded to remain awhile longer, and Mr. Shimmans replaced my knapsack in his wagon.

The train followed up the Platte about twenty-two miles, and camped opposite the head of Grand

Island.¹⁰ Here the river is nearly, or quite, three miles wide, and dotted with many small islands. This afternoon for the first time, we saw the emigrants on the opposite side of the river, and judging from the lines of wagons, and the many camp fires that gleam in the night, they are even more numerous than on this side.

Friday, May 31. This morning I waded nearly across the river; in but a few places was the water over two feet deep. On the south side the current was strong, though apparently shallow; but as the bottom was of very soft quicksand, I deemed it prudent not to attempt a crossing. I think, however, there are places where it might be forded with a wagon. The whole bed of the river is quicksand, and in passing over one must keep in constant motion to prevent sinking. There are also many swift currents which, with the quicksand, make it a dangerous stream.

Our road was near the river, and almost perfectly level, the plain having a deep, black soil, and bearing an abundance of buffalo grass. Passing several ponds of alkaline water, at noon we halted at Elm Creek, overshadowed to the northern bluff with a line of drooping elms. While here the company was electrified with the

¹⁰ They should have been opposite Fort Kearney and in sight of the Oregon Trail on the south side of the Platte, but he nowhere speaks of seeing the Fort.

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cry of, "Buffalo!"¹¹ and far to the northwest we saw them, resting like a cloud on the hills, only part of the herd visible; with a wavy motion it rose and fell, and disappeared from sight.

In the afternoon a herd of bright-eyed antelope came playfully around the moving train as though desiring an acquaintance, or, at least, trusting our kind sympathies. Alas, for their misplaced confidence, several were shot, and one, trembling with fright, dashed through the train toward the hills, pursued by several rifle balls, two horsemen, and a large dog; but marvelously making its escape into the open plain, where it occasionally stopped and gazed back upon its baffled pursuers.

We traveled twenty-five miles and camped near a slough. The water was clear and pleasant to the taste, until some of the oxen trampled into it, when it emitted a nauseous odor, and the taste became strongly metallic. This gave us considerable inconvenience as we were half a mile from the river.

Saturday, June 1. Rain commenced falling last night, and continued during the entire day. Consequently, we traveled but ten miles, and early in the afternoon camped on the bank of the river, near an island, on which large bunches of willows supplied us with fuel.

¹¹ Clayton notes the appearance of buffalo at about the same point on May 1, 1847, p. 117.

CHAPTER IV

A Stampede, Indian Scare, Buffaloes, Wolves

SUNDAY, June 2. The camp was not moved, and at an early hour many were busy. Loads were overhauled and repacked, tent and wagon trimmings were repaired, coffee, sufficient for the week, roasted ready for use; baking, washing, mending, etc., received attention. But this was not the only way in which the Sabbath was remembered. Its real purpose was not forgotten; there were hymns and prayers. A goodly number of the company are devoted Christians, who hail the Lord's day with a devotion which wanes not during the week.

Monday, June 3. Last night, during a heavy thunder storm, several of the oxen ran out of the corral, and were not brought back until 11 A.M. Our journey was then continued, and in two miles, on a small mound south of the road, we found the grave of J. Ward, of Wisconsin, who died yesterday from an injury received at Kaneshville. During the day there were frequent showers and we traveled but thirteen miles, and camped at Ptah Lake. As the sentinels attributed the fright of the oxen

A STAMPEDE

last night to the presence of Indians, a strong guard was posted, not only to watch, but to act on the defensive in case of an attack.

Tuesday, June 4. Left camp at an early hour, and late in the afternoon the dead level of our road was relieved by some low sand ridges, and a little before dark the corral was formed on the bank of the river, where large dry willows supplied an abundance of fuel. After the oxen were brought in and the guards took their places, the clouds which all day had draped the sky, settled about the camp, and a heavy storm of rain and thunder set in, continuing most of the night.

About ten o'clock, while spreading my blanket for sleep in Mr. Shimman's tent, there was a sudden noise in the corral—a confusion of trampling, rushing, crowding—a crash! and the voices of the sentinels were heard at their highest note shouting "Stampede! Stampede!"

In a moment all were out, rifle in hand, thinking that Indians had attacked the camp. It appeared that all the oxen, at the same instant, sprang to their feet, and crowded to the entrance of the corral; driven back by the guard, they dashed to the other side, overturned two wagons, breaking them in pieces, ran over a tent in which were six sleeping men and disappeared in the darkness. Fortunately, no person, not even the six in the tent, was hurt, but it gave them a first-class fright. The tent was about ten by twelve feet; in one end the men

lay folded in their blankets, the other contained their camp stove and cooking utensils, over which about two hundred oxen trampled in their wild flight.

After the tent fell, the men, held down by the stout tent cloth, found it impossible to escape until the terrible trampling feet had gone. But their kitchen outfit was utterly ruined. It was too dark to search for the teams, and fearing Indians, a strong guard was posted and all the men were ready, rifle in hand, as the anxious hours dragged along. At last the rain ceased; stars appeared in the west and soon illuminated the whole sky. Gradually they became fainter in the east; a dark bank, formed as by receding night gathered in the west, then sank from view, and it was daylight. Probably one-half of the oxen were in sight, and after a hurried breakfast, nearly the whole company turned out in search of the strays.

A young man named Richardson and I set out together in a northern direction. Fresh tracks in the wet sand led us to a ravine among the bluffs. We followed this trail, and in eight or nine miles the sand terminated in clay ridges, very broken; in places rising over a hundred feet in perpendicular banks. Still we found no difficulty in following the fresh trail. Sometimes, in grassy flats, the tracks would separate, but again come together in some ravine. The sun passed the meridian, and yet we hurried on. Late in the afternoon, while ascending a broad valley, we found the footprints of unshod horses

crossing our path. Supposing a party of Indians had just passed, Richardson declared he would go no farther. To my mind it was evident that the Indians were not following our trail, as it was too plain to be overlooked, and so fresh that the tracks must have been made within an hour. Probably the oxen were just over the ridge, and the narrow gully ahead was as good a hiding place as we could find, and now, warned by the tracks, we could be on our guard. He, however, turned toward the camp, telling me that if I wished to save my life, I would follow his example.

Before morning I wished I had done so, but now felt ashamed to go back after trying to persuade him to go on. I therefore took the trail, following up the ravine almost on a run, watching and listening, and becoming more fearful as I advanced. After reaching the top of the ridge and cautiously creeping around a spur to get a view of the valley, I caught sight of the horses. They were at a considerable distance, but the more I examined them the more I was convinced that there were no Indians with them. Approaching by way of a ravine, and peering through the grass, though still about forty rods distant they seemed to be aware of my presence; possibly they scented me, for raising their heads they dashed away, to all appearance, perfectly wild. Relieved from the fear of Indians, I felt sure of bringing the strays into camp. Taking the trail I hurried on, until from a

high clay ridge I looked down to where the path entered a wide valley and, to my utter disappointment, saw some twenty buffalo, evidently the same, whose tracks I had followed during the entire day.

It was a long day's journey from camp, how far I could only guess; tired, hungry and thirsty, having forgotten my canteen, and failed to find any good water during the day. I thought of shooting a buffalo, but since morning I had not seen sufficient wood to cook supper, and as the buffalo chips were wet, I gave it up. The sun was just disappearing, and its yellow light rested on the highest knolls as I lay down on the grass, having decided to take a night's rest and then find the camp at my leisure.

Presently a large, whitish wolf made its appearance; then two more; their howls were answered by others, until the gulches echoed in one continuous roar. As the day faded they became more bold, coming nearer, until I found it would be impossible to keep them at bay during the night without a fire. It was a moonless night, but the stars shone out, and turning my back on the constellation of Ursa Major, I started for camp.

I cannot say that the wolves followed me; they were on all sides. The long, smooth howl of the large, white wolf, the sharp bark of the prairie wolf, and the shrill screech of the jackal, while at a distance seemed in unison, but the infernal chorus grew awfully discordant at a

near approach. I would then fire my rifle and pistols among them, reloading as I ran. At the report they would scatter, and for awhile keep a greater distance; but always there was a bitter fight among them after a shot, and I believe that the wounded were at once devoured.

In the open ground it was not difficult to keep them at bay; but in the deep gullies as I looked up into their glaring eyes and saw how easily they might spring upon me, I realized that, like David, there was but a step between me and death. However, I kept in the open ground as much as possible; but at best, it was a terrible night, and O, how I longed for the morning.

Toward morning, while following a long, high ridge, most of my pursuers left me. Occasionally a few unanswered howls would roll off on the air; but for once I was glad at being deserted and left to pursue my way alone. Nearly exhausted, and suffering greatly with thirst, I descended into a deep basin among the sand hills; the grass grew tall, and the ground felt soft and wet. Stooping down and parting the grass and weeds, I drank freely, and, invigorated by the draught, traveled with greater ease. The stars at last faded, light streaks shot up from the eastern horizon, changing from white to rose, from rose to pink, and at last a livid crimson ushered in the day. I was now in sight of the Platte valley, and on reaching the emigrant trail, turned down the

river, and in about two miles found the camp of the Wisconsin Blues.

Friday, June 7. I spent this day at the camp as a guard of the oxen. I did not realize until today how great was the tide of emigration. The trains passed our camp like the flow of a river, and I suppose the line extends from Iowa to the Rocky Mountains. Some have mules, others horses, but the greatest number have oxen, and there does not seem to be much difference in their speed.

Conjecture was rife concerning the cause of the stampede; most attributed it to the presence of a herd of buffalo. It seems evident that it could not have been Indians, as no traces of them were found. Though some still cling to this idea, and as a consequence have borne no part in the search, but rumor says it is laziness, rather than fear of Indians. Some attributed the fright to the growling of a large dog, and so poor Tray was decoyed from camp and shot, I suppose like his well known predecessor, for no other cause than being found in bad company.

CHAPTER V

Fort Laramie of the Plains

SATURDAY, JUNE 8. Early this morning I left camp in company with five young men, taking a north-west course. In about ten miles we found six of the strays, which we sent in by a party returning from the search. A little after noon we ascended a high clay ridge, and saw that to the westward, as far as the eye could reach, the whole country literally swarmed with buffalo. There seemed to be thousands; great masses, small groups, and lone ones feeding among the bluffs.

We determined to take one for dinner, and I crept down the ridge to get a shot at a cow that was feeding in the ravine below. Just then one of the men fired at a large bull that was on the opposite side of the ridge in another ravine. He was not much hurt, but enraged, and smarting under the wound, ran around to the point of the ridge into the ravine where I was, saw me and gave chase. I tried to elude him by running across a spur into the breaks or gullies, but he was too close; so I turned and leveled my rifle, first at his head, but his long, matted, front hair, filled with clay, I feared might

stop the bullet, so lowering my aim, as his nose swung to one side uncovering his left breast, I fired. It was a thrilling moment; he was so furious and so near. A short jump succeeded the report; another effort and the huge mass swayed, fell, and rolled into the ravine. On examination, I found that the bullet had passed through the *vena cava*, near the heart. We sliced off some choice pieces of steak, built a fire of "buffalo chips" and roasted it as best we could; but these chips do not make coals, and though we had salt and canteens of water, our cooking was not a success.

Today I learned to distinguish between the track of a buffalo and an ox. At first glance they seem just alike; both have a cloven foot, but the foot of a buffalo in outline is almost, or quite, a perfect circle. The ox has a longer foot and the inner toe of the working ox is slightly shorter than the other. Had I known this some days ago, I would not have followed a herd of buffalo, thinking they were oxen.

Late in the afternoon we found some small dead cedar trees near a pond of brackish water. This was suggestive; and as antelope were plenty we determined to get one for supper. Going into an open valley where the grass was tall, we fastened a red handkerchief to a ramrod, and one displayed it in the breeze, while the rest of us, rifle in hand, lay as nearly concealed as possible. As antelope are possessed of great curiosity, a flock of them

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were soon attracted by the flag and, when near enough, one was singled out and shot.

We had a good supper but towards midnight there was a heavy thunder shower. Still, in spite of the drenching rain and the howling wolves, some of our company slept. In trying to keep the wolves at bay we had burned all our wood and at the dawn, without breakfast, wet and chilled, we started for camp. However, exercise soon warmed us up and, though by a circuitous route, we reached camp early in the afternoon.

After five days' search forty-five oxen are missing, and are considered lost. It seems singular that old, and apparently worn-out oxen, will take fright and run like buffalo. Those we have found are so wild it is necessary to picket them to prevent their running away. And that which excites the greatest wonder of all, is the fact that two other trains of oxen, only a few miles distant, stampeded the same night and hour in which ours ran.

About one-third of the company, none of whom had suffered by the stampede, this morning folded their tents and quietly stole away. Of course, it was the violation of a solemn contract, but there was no court to enforce it, and the tide of emigration was so great they had no fear of Indians; hence their heartless desertion. But the removal of so many, whose teams were intact, overburdened the remainder. It was not easy to supply the

place of forty-five oxen, or to distribute their loads. Still, though it caused sadness, there was a relief in having those withdraw who had proved themselves unfaithful and an equal relief in being associated with those who, in trial, had been found true. And among the number were the three families, Hayden, Sherman, and Spencer, among whom were all the ladies that belonged to the company.

Monday, June 10. The broken wagons had been repaired; and the True Blues, after adjusting loads and apportioning the remaining oxen to the best advantage, concluded to divide into two independent companies and so resume the journey. This was done under the impression that a less number of oxen together would be best. Our road curved around the north side of the Pawnee Swamp, the edge of which seemed to be composed of the bones and carcasses of buffalo. Whole herds, as they swept down from the steep bluffs, must have perished in the deep mud. At the swamp's most northern point we found a large, cold spring. After some twenty miles' travel we camped at Carrion Creek, where was a rich soil, plenty of grass, and a bunch of low willows which afforded a scanty supply of fuel.

At sunset a horseman from among the bluffs, pursued by a large buffalo, dashed at full speed toward our camp. Soon the buffalo stopped, turned and made for the bluffs. The horseman turned and gave chase, then halted

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an instant, and fired at the buffalo, which instantly turned and furiously pursued his foe for some distance and again endeavored to escape; but another shot from the hunter's rifle brought him down.

Tuesday, June 11. With the dawn the second division of the Wisconsin Blues, which camped near us, was up and away, and soon after sunrise, with heavily loaded wagons, the third division brought up the rear.

The final adjustment was not consummated. At first, all members of the company signed articles solemnly pledging themselves to assist each other in case of the loss of team, wagon, etc., but when teams were lost, a large number who had lost none, withdrew. Then there were those who did not immediately desert, but when asked to give a yoke of oxen to an unfortunate companion, or take part of his load, simply said "I can't." Had nothing but sympathy to give, but, of course, sympathy could neither pull a wagon nor carry a load.

Next were those, a considerable number, who faithfully and cheerfully assisted the unfortunates and adjusted the teams and loads for mutual benefit. And I observed that when the company broke up, it divided into these three classes, and the arrangement was a case of natural selection. While I had no team or wagon with which to help or need help, I was glad to find that my best friends were among those who kept their promise, and stood by the unfortunate.

About nine in the forenoon we passed a small cottonwood grove, said to be the last timber on the north bank of the Platte for two hundred miles.

This afternoon I followed up the valley of a wide creek two or three miles and then climbed the bluffs on the west side where I encountered an immense herd of buffalo. Hastily climbing a rock, from my safe perch I surveyed the scene. They seemed to have been frightened and were rushing for the creek valley. As they dashed down the ravines like a torrent, part of the herd passed on either side of my rock, but were utterly oblivious to my presence. I felt grateful for my convenient retreat and shuddered at the thought of being caught in the front of a frightened herd. Many of these animals are wantonly killed by the emigrants. At one place, some distance from the road, I saw twelve lying dead. Such destruction of game doubtless enrages the Indians against the whites. Having traveled about nineteen miles, our train camped at Mud Creek. Hitherto we have found either trees or willows for fuel; here we have neither; there is, however, an abundance of buffalo chips.

Wednesday, June 12. Soon after leaving camp we saw six buffalo coming across the river, and hoping to obtain a supply of fresh steak several of us set out to take one as soon as they reached our bank. But as though aware of our intent, they changed their course, and seemed de-

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terminated to avoid us by landing about a mile farther up. We saw that to get one there must be a race. So, by way of preparation, some pulled off their coats, others threw off powder flasks and accouterments. Captain Furry drew off his boots, and for some time took the lead, but coming down, with both feet, on a large prickly pear, he fell writhing with pain to the ground. For him the race was ended, and its sudden stop subjected him to the torture of having the barbed points extracted from his bleeding feet.

But unheeding the fall of our comrade, we dashed by him and reached the bank just as two had effected a landing. There was a simultaneous discharge of rifles, and soon the hindmost lay lifeless near the road. It was a young cow, and when the wagons arrived it was sliced and stowed away. The others (four) swam back, and their landing was hailed by the rifles of the emigrants on the south side of the river.

About nine miles from camp we crossed the North Bluff Fork of Platte River, a wide shallow stream, quicksand bottom, and low verdureless banks. This afternoon the wagons were almost swamped in deep, hot sand; the reduced teams being insufficient for their heavy loads. Still we traveled twenty miles, and camped on a low, marshy flat near the Platte. Finding a large log of driftwood, the axes were soon busy, and the moonless night was enlivened by several fires.

I had finished my supper of buffalo steak, tea, and hard bread, and sat by a large fire in silent rumination. My companions, in every attitude that culinary care could invent, were discoursing loudly, while now and then some apt joke would raise a merry laugh. Suddenly a shot, the alarm signal of the sentinel, rang out. Every whisper was hushed, and listening attentively, we could hear the tread of footsteps coming down the bluff. A moment sufficed to change the whole scene. The fires were deserted; and on the side toward the guard, the men stood with firmly clasped rifles, and strained eyeballs. The guard retreats—is hailed—it is not the savage yell, but the feeble voice of a tired, almost fainting emigrant.

Three men, hungry, thirsty, and exhausted with running, entered our camp. They had been hunting and were pursued by a party of mounted Indians, supposed to be Sioux. Hiding among the rocks they eluded their pursuers until dark, and then made an effort to find the road, but were discovered, and had been chased about six miles. It was a race for life, and only on coming in sight of our camp fire was the pursuit relinquished. One had lost his hat, the other his shoes, yet, with torn and bleeding feet he had kept on his way. After resting and taking supper, they went to their company, which had passed us at sunset, and was camped about a mile distant.

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The thought of hostile savages prowling around the camp produced a feeling of unrest, and all were relieved when the night was gone.

Thursday, June 13. A weary pull of twenty miles through soft sand and deep mud, and we again camped on the river bank. No firewood in our camp, and as no fires are visible, there is, no doubt, a general lack.

Friday, June 14. As my stock of hard bread was nearly gone, and I was just ready to push on to Fort Laramie for another supply, Mr. Young came to me with a very pleasant, though unexpected offer. He said his men had talked the matter over, and if I could obtain one hundred pounds of flour, and agree to pay them one hundred and twenty dollars after reaching California, they would welcome me as one of their mess for the remainder of the journey.

From the time of my decision at Council Bluffs, I was fully convinced that a trip across the plains alone, even if the elements of danger were eliminated, would be very lonely, and certainly no arrangement would please me more than to complete the journey with these men.

Remembering that in a train camped near was a wagon so overloaded that yesterday it was difficult to bring it through the mud, I lost no time in finding the owners, and they were glad to sell me a sack containing one hundred and twenty-five pounds of flour. It was transferred to the wagon of Messrs. Young & Co., and I

became a member of their mess, which consisted of John L. Young, George S. Matlock, Abraham Hughes, Isaiah J. Hughes, Robert McCord and John Donnelly. They had two wagons and although they had lost three oxen in the stampede, still retained good teams; having also a pair of milk cows trained to the yoke.

Our road lay between the river and terminating spurs of a long chain of sand hills, in places through deep sloughs. Traveled about twenty miles, and camped by the river, at the mouth of Watch Creek. Two of our company who had crossed the river, surprised us with the story of cholera on the south side. It had followed the emigrants from the frontier,¹² with fatal effect and created such terror that the afflicted were liable to be abandoned. In a camp which had consisted of a mess of eight men, two were in their graves, three were sick, one watching with them, and two looking after the teams. They had two wagons and a good outfit, and had been associated with a large company; but when cholera and death came, their companions were frightened away. The story was very depressing to us, for several of our company were afflicted with malignant diarrhea.

¹² Those taking that road, the old Oregon Trail, embodying their trains as far south as Independence, came from Missouri, central and southern Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, and more easterly sections. In 1849 the cholera attacked large numbers on the lower Missouri and pursued the trains to the upper crossing of Platte River. This year, we shall see, it persisted even to the Humboldt.

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Saturday, June 15. Four miles from camp we passed the "Lone Tree," a small cedar near the river, said to be the only tree on the north bank for two hundred miles.¹³ The grass grew tall, and the flowers were dew-gemmed in the circle of its shadow. It was unmarred by an axe, though travelers are often in great need of fuel; but nearly all who pass rob it of a small branch as a souvenir. Crossing some low sand ridges, our road entered upon a level plain bearing an abundance of buffalo grass. Here we camped, and by digging about two feet found pretty good water, and again gathered chips for fuel.

Sunday, June 16. Our road today, with the exception of some low sand ridges, was very smooth and level. After traveling sixteen miles, early in the afternoon we camped by a small lake, in the midst of an extended plain.

Oh, what a glorious picture, to survey
This broad expanse at sunset's closing scene;
While the eye wanders, restless, far away,
And twilight tints the landscape gold and green.

But there is little time to study the grand and beautiful. Camp work, like woman's work, is never done. Day and night, with the ceaseless flow of time, the workers and watchers must keep their unfailing vigils.

¹³ A famous landmark, sketched by a military artist in 1849, and mentioned by George Kellogg who was on our author's trail at that point June 16, 1849. Turnbull, in 1852, does not mention it.

Monday, June 17. This morning three of our company started for Fort Laramie in advance of the train, supposing that some of the oxen, on the night of the stampede, might have crossed the river, and being taken up by the emigrants on the south side, could be recovered at the fort.

As we advance, the scenery is more interesting. This forenoon from the spur of a gravel ridge we obtained a view of Chimney Rock, far to the westward. Descending the bluffs our trail led around the Ancient Ruins, so named from their fancied resemblance to castles, houses, etc. They are isolated sand rocks, carved by the winds and weather into beautiful forms. But, while climbing through the arches, we were several times startled by the sharp buzz of the rattlesnake. In the afternoon we traversed a rich, grassy plain, and at sunset camped near the river. The scenery on all sides is extremely beautiful; level plains bordered with mountain-like cliffs.

Tuesday, June 18. Following up the Platte and passing Convent Rock, which is south of the river and several miles distant, our road lay through a level plain, in places crusted with saleratus and dotted with an occasional alkali pond. In the afternoon we passed Chimney Rock,¹⁴ also on the south side, and on the top of a bluff, rising from a pile of rocks, it stands like the lone chim-

¹⁴ A good drawing of this curiosity, which looks like an inverted funnel, is in Fremont, John C. *Report*, 1842-1844.

LONE TREE



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ney sometimes seen after a building has been destroyed by fire.

Two men from the south side of the river gave us the details of a terrible tragedy enacted near this landmark a few days since:

Two men who prepared their outfit in company at Independence, had frequent quarrels in regard to their traveling and camping arrangements. Going into camp near Chimney Rock, the quarrel was renewed, and one of the company with which they traveled, no doubt tired of the contention but probably in jest, proposed that they fight it out and quit. Whereupon, in the heat of passion, they drew their hunting knives and closed in mortal combat. In a few minutes one fell and almost instantly died; the other, fainting from loss of blood, was carried into the shade of a tent where, within an hour, he too expired; and with the grim irony of fate, at sunset they were laid side by side in the same grave.

Our road today being good we traveled twenty-three miles, and a little before sunset camped on the plain, where we found tolerably good water at a depth of three feet. Water from the river, left to settle and cool during the night, is, no doubt, healthful, but without this process it is so muddy and warm that it is not only nauseous, but tends to develop diarrhea. Surface ponds are clear, but more or less stagnant; therefore, unless we find a spring, which is seldom, or a running brook, we believe it

is more healthful, and certainly the water is cooler when taken from a well. Of course, the teams obtain their supply from river, pond, spring, or creek.

Wednesday, June 19. Still following up the river on an extensive plain somewhat sandy: but we traveled twenty-four miles and camped near a small pond. About noon we passed a high cliff south of the river, and from the following sad story, known as Scott's Bluff. A company of traders returning from Fort Laramie were robbed by Indians, who not only took their horses and provisions, but stripped them almost entirely of their clothing. One of their number, named Scott, fell sick, and despairing of ever reaching home, persuaded his companions to leave him under a sheltering cliff at these bluffs. Some time after, human bones were found near the place, which were supposed to be those of Scott.

Thursday, June 20. Last evening after the teams were taken out to feed, Thomas Dowson, one of the guards, came running into camp, greatly agitated, saying he had been bitten by a rattlesnake. Retiring to his tent he lay groaning and writhing in extreme agony. He said the snake began to rattle in the grass almost under his feet and had struck its fangs through his boot into the side of his foot. The boot was drawn off, the limb bandaged, and in the meantime those who were not at the tent were making diligent search for Dr. Callaman who, when the train came into camp, had gone out to hunt, and it

was almost an hour before he reached the side of our suffering companion. Upon examining the wound, the barbed thorn of a prickly pear was found deeply lodged in the flesh.

On being informed of this, his pain was instantly gone, and he quietly submitted to its extraction. But, alas for him, he was now held up to ridicule, that malapert spirit of the camp, and so sharp the satire, and pointed the jests, that, at last he expressed his annoyance by saying, "Boys, this is worse than the bite of a rattlesnake. I wish it *had* bit me."

While some distance north of the road on a hunting excursion, I observed on a high ridge, the singular mode in which the Sioux dispose of their dead. A cedar tree that forked at a considerable height, had one of the fork limbs removed, and an Indian, wrapped in his buffalo robe, was placed with his feet upon the stump and firmly bound with thongs to the upright limb. His face was covered with the robe, but a tuft of long, black hair trembled in the wind, as he stood like a warrior on his watch, alike unheeding the lowering storm or the approach of the stranger.

The country through which we traveled today is quite barren; gravel ridges and sandy flats, prickly pear and wild sage instead of grass, but after twenty-two miles we camped among large cottonwood trees, one-fourth of a mile from the river. This, according to our

reckoning, was the first timber near the north bank of the Platte for one hundred and ninety-six miles, except the "Lone Tree." We have learned to appreciate the camp fire, it makes all feel more cheerful, but it is like medicine to the sick.

Friday, June 21. Last night a heavy thunder storm swept over our camp, but every cloud disappeared with the dawn. In five miles we came to Rawhide Creek which, swollen by the late rain, overflowed its banks and deluged the surrounding plain. This caused considerable delay, and starting in before the stream had sufficiently fallen, some of the wagons came near being overturned. Traveled seventeen miles and camped on the river bank about two miles below Fort Laramie, over which waves the Stars and Stripes. Far to the westward we can see the dark, ragged peaks of the Black Hills.

Saturday, June 22. We did not travel. Our comrades who came in advance failed to find any of the strays, but tell us terrible stories of cholera. This forenoon three men were buried from the Fort. Seven others are sick, and two of our company, Messrs. Furry and Wait, have placed themselves under the care of the surgeon at the Fort.

Sunday, June 23. Several persons once of our company, but who left after the stampede, came to our camp with the sad intelligence that Mr. Bailly of Wisconsin died in camp this morning at daybreak. He was one of

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the six in the tent over which the oxen ran in their flight from the corral. Although he appeared uninjured at the time, he never recovered from the terrible shock; suffering from nervous prostration, and afterward becoming subject to fits of which he died. Nearly the whole company gathered in mournful procession and buried him beneath the branches of an oak which stood on an elevation near the river.

Sickness and death around us had a very depressing influence, and we thought best to push on to the highlands of the Rocky Mountains with all possible haste.

Therefore, hoping to cross the river and make ready for an early start, we moved our camp to the ferry, and at sunset two of the wagons were taken over, when the ferryline broke and the boat drifted down the river but was safely landed on the western bank. A great number of wagons had been brought to the river in hopes of having them ferried during the night.¹⁵ The tents had been stowed away, and, as we hourly expected to cross, they were not pitched. No fires were kindled, and in low conversation, we sat in groups under the cottonwood trees.

Overhead, to a long branch, was bound the dead body

¹⁵ The Mormons ferried across at that point, so did the gold seekers in 1849. But in 1852 the road on the north side was followed to the Sweetwater. Turnbull, *Proceedings St. Hist. Soc. of Wis.*, 1913.

of a Sioux papoose wrapped in a buffalo robe and tied firmly to the limb. Thus, the tree-rocked cradle of these Indians at death becomes their bier. And it sometimes happens that the bough which rocked their infant slumbers, when they return to the childhood of age, rocks them again in the dreamless sleep of death.

A beautiful moonlight touched the dark shadows with silver, but the chill, plague-laden air, the sad events of the day, and the absence of the camp fire, were very depressing as hour after hour dragged gloomily away. Toward morning, however, several skilled musicians, with violins, seated themselves against the trunk of a giant tree, and after cheering the crowd with their lively strains, inspired a sprightly dance, in which the ladies of several companies participated. The mirth seemed contagious, and a more cheerful spirit pervaded the camp.

Monday, June 24. Early this morning the rope was repaired, and the remainder of our wagons ferried over. The oxen were then driven into the river, and all swam safely to the western bank. Just as I was about to cross, a company arrived, among whom I found my friend from Wisconsin, Mr. Alfred Newman. We crossed the river, and together visited Fort Laramie. It stands near the junction of the Platte and Laramie rivers, about a mile from each, in a beautiful place; the scenery around is interesting, while the neat buildings reminded us of

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civilization and home. The garrison was small,¹⁶ probably insufficient to protect the emigrants should the Indians have taken to the warpath. But the attraction of the fort, just then, was the celebrated Kit Carson,¹⁷ the companion and guide of Fremont.

¹⁶ An earlier party, which reached Laramie at the end of May, reported the presence of 150 men in the garrison. Letter of P. Wechselberg, Ms. in St. Hist. Library, Madison.

¹⁷ For a short biography see *Dictionary of Am. Biography*. Volume III.

CHAPTER VI

The Black Hills and Independence Rock

PARTING with Mr. Newman, and returning to my train, I learned that because of some difficulty with certain members of the company, Mr. Sherman had withdrawn, and with his wife, child, and a young man, had gone on alone. My remaining time was devoted to writing letters, which were mailed at the Fort. Late in the afternoon, over a broken ridge, we lost sight of the old flag, and in about eight miles descended to a beautiful camping place near the Platte River. Close to our camp are six graves bearing the ominous inscription, "Died of Cholera." Nothing seems to stay this terrible malady. Each day adds new victims, and I was told that more than a hundred deaths of emigrants, on the south side of the Platte, had been registered at the Fort.

Tuesday, June 25. This morning we left the river and struck across the terminating spurs of the Black Hills. In about seven miles, leaving the train, I descended into a deep ravine on the right of the road, to visit a warm spring. It was very large, and with a temperature of ninety degrees. Ascending through a cañon, or great

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cleft in the rock, I came out on a wide prairie, across which was clearly marked the red outline of the road. My own train was pursuing its way in the distance, but a group of tents and wagons near the road, indicated an unwilling halt.

As I approached I saw in a tent, the sides of which were lifted, a young man in the last stages of cholera. Kind hands had raised him up and, no doubt, rendered all possible aid. In his delirium he was repeating familiar names, probably of brothers and sisters. At last he exclaimed, "O, mother! mother! why don't some of you come?" And looking earnestly around, as if trying to recognize some familiar face, the light faded from his eyes, and he was gone. His companions went out to prepare his grave by the side of two others which yesterday had met a like fate. All the rest of the company seemed in usual health, but language could not express how depressed and sad they were. Greatly affected by the scene I hurried away, but ere I had crossed the prairie, found six more newly made graves, showing how rapidly cholera was doing its work.

On the west side of this prairie stands Porter's Rock, a large block of beautiful white sandstone, on which a great many names were carved, making it a kind of wayside register of all who passed. Descending through a dry channel, crossing Bitter Creek, and following up a short distance, I found the camp among some large

trees. The general appearance of the country has undergone an entire change. The broad plains of the lower Platte, with their rich carpeting of grass and flowers, have been exchanged for barren ridges of rock, and sage covered valleys. But cold springs and running brooks, lined with timber, are numerous.

Wednesday, June 26. Left camp at sunrise, and by a far reaching semicircle came to Dead Timber Creek. Groves of large trees killed by forest fires give to the creek its name. Following up a branch of this creek to its source on the side of a high spur of Laramie Peak, we took dinner in the shade of some large pines.

After my train had gone, I sat in the shade for some time, and had almost fallen asleep, but was aroused by the arrival of another train, and as all seemed interested in something at the rear, I went thither. A blanket was spread by a large sage bush and a dying man was lifted from the wagon and placed upon it. He had suffered from cholera, but evidently his pain was gone. His lips moved but no sounds reached our ears. We stood around him in breathless silence for a few minutes when his breathing ceased and his eyes closed in death.

A pick and couple of spades were left, and the train moved on. Four young men stopped and dug a grave in which the body was laid, with his blanket for a coffin and winding sheet, on which the earth was heaped. A rough, uninscribed board indicated the head of the grave

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on which a low pine throws its perpetual shadow and sighs his requiem. These men told me that within a few days five of their company had died of cholera. They tried to be cheerful, jested and laughed, but there was an undercurrent of sorrow betrayed by the tears they tried to repress.

As we descended the ridge we paused a few moments at a grave which had been prepared with unusual care. Small pines had been planted at the head and foot, but like her who lay beneath, they were withered and dead. A neatly carved board bore the solitary name, "Jemima," and even this the first fire which sweeps over these hills will deface; but she will still live in the affection of those who transplanted these pines and carved the name.

Late in the afternoon we descended into the valley of Horse Creek. Here one of the young men complained of feeling sick, saying he believed he was taking cholera. His comrades tried to laugh away his fears, but his illness increased, and with great difficulty he reached his camp on Horse Creek near Heber's Spring. Here we learned that his sister was also suffering from cholera. My train was camped near by on a tributary of Horse Creek. We had traveled about seventeen miles around Laramie Peak, which, from our camp, presents a magnificent sight.

Thursday, June 27. This morning Henry and Louisa

Williams, the two stricken with cholera yesterday in a neighboring train, were buried. The young lady died about midnight, and her brother lingered until the dawn. A deep, wide grave was prepared, in which the bodies were laid, side by side, coffinless, to mingle with the clay. Their parents and only remaining child, a boy of sixteen, gazed upon the scene in silent because inexpressible grief. A board was placed at the head of the grave bearing the simple inscription

HENRY AND LOUISA WILLIAMS,
AGED 21 AND 18 YEARS,
DIED OF CHOLERA,
JUNE 27TH, A.D., 1850.

They rest in a beautiful place; around one side is a fringe of cottonwood and willow trees spreading their vine wreathed branches over the brook. On the opposite side rises a curving bank of rock, inclosing the grassy flat where several graves tell the sad story that death had preceded us.

When the teams were ready it was hard for the father, mother, and brother to leave that sacred place. They lingered, and again and again wished themselves all back in their Missouri home. But they were not alone in their sorrow. Within two weeks, out of that company of less than fifty, death had claimed eight. All the emigrants were anxious, and hopefully looking to the mountain

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highlands as an escape from "the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noonday."

Our road crossed a succession of high ridges, in places steep and rocky. At noon we took dinner at the crossing of La Bonte Creek. In the afternoon we crossed a high ridge, the west slope of which was covered with bright, red clay. This, however, seemed only a surface deposit, for in the gulches could be seen strata of soft, white, chalk-like rocks. Traveled eighteen miles and camped among cottonwood trees, by a small, clear brook.

Friday, June 28. Our trail led among isolated hills and ridges, abounding in volcanic debris, and bearing only a small growth of sage. Later in the afternoon we reached A la Prele, a clear, swift running creek, yet marked through a narrow green valley with a line of low birch and alders.

Here we learned that Mr. Sherman, formerly of our company, was camped in the valley and very sick. William Kingsbury and I turned aside to visit him, and our train went on. We found him suffering from cholera. The attack began last night, and all day he has been making a brave fight for his life. His wife had applied such remedies as she could, but he gradually became worse, and shortly after our arrival his mind began to wander. About this time two large trains came into the valley and camped. On inquiry I found two physicians,

who came at once, and exerted their utmost skill, but about midnight saw that he must die.

His wife, seeing him more quiet, fondly hoped it was the rest that indicated returning health, and the physicians dared not tell her the awful truth; "For," said they, "broken of her usual rest, worn out with toil and care and burdened with anxiety, she must have sleep before she realizes her great sorrow, or their boy will be left an orphan." And so, with the assurance that we would do all that could be done for her husband, she was persuaded to seek rest. Thinking that her husband was doing well she retired to her tent and slept soundly until sunrise.

Mr. Sherman did not again become conscious, but died an hour before sunrise. The body, arranged as nicely as possible, was laid out in a fly tent, and in the early morning Kingsbury and I prepared a grave, some distance from the camp, beneath a spreading birch. When Mrs. Sherman came out of her tent, she saw at a glance that her husband was dead, and Kingsbury led her to the tent where the body lay.

In the meantime I visited one of the neighboring trains in which were several families, told them the sad story and asked some lady to come and invite Mrs. Sherman and her little boy to breakfast. There was a kindly response, and soon Mrs. Sherman and her son were at breakfast, and made to feel the heart-sympathy she so

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much needed. Wishing to save her from seeing her husband buried without a coffin, as soon as she had gone the body was laid in the grave, covered with boughs and the earth heaped thereon. The tents were struck, baggage packed and teams ready when she returned. Long and bitterly did she weep over that lone grave before she could make up her mind to leave it. At first she thought she must return to her friends in Wisconsin, but as this seemed impossible she at last consented to go with us to our camp. So the oxen were attached to the wagon, and with a silent adieu to our comrade's grave we moved slowly from the glen.

In about six miles we found our company camped near a small creek, and just as we arrived the wagons rolled out to the trail. Crossing a high ridge we descended to the Platte River, up which we followed until sunset and then camped in a grove by a large spring, near the mouth of Deer Creek. Near our camp is the outcropping of what seems an extensive coal mine.¹⁸ Pleasant fires were built, songs and hymns were sung, but with all our efforts to be cheerful an oppressive sadness prevailed.

Sunday, June 30. In this wild land, where by river, plain, valley and hill—wherever we turn—a freshly

¹⁸ Major Osborne Cross, of the Mounted Rifle Regiment, noted the outcrop of coal on Deer Creek, July 1, 1849. *Oregon Expedition, 1849*, pp. 44-45.

made grave shows where a once bounding heart lies cold and still, and life seems groping in the shadow of death, it is a relief to have the Sabbath come.

According to our estimate we are now about twenty-two miles from the upper ferry of the Platte, but fearing we might be detained there, and that grass for the teams would be scarce, we resolved to cross a little above the mouth of Deer Creek. Therefore a raft was prepared and the day spent in ferrying the wagons over. The river was about three hundred yards wide, with a very swift current, which, in crossing, would carry the raft a long distance below, when with a line we would tow it up the river nearly half a mile and then row back for another wagon. In the meantime the oxen were driven into the river and all swam safely over.¹⁹

When all the wagons were across we put up the tents near some cottonwood trees. Nailed to one of these we found a note addressed to us, and bearing the sad intelligence that one of our former companions had died of cholera a few days since while coming up the north side of the river. We built large fires and stood around them to dry our clothes, as at sunset a chilling wind swept down from the northwest.

Monday, July 1. With the dawn we were on our way

¹⁹ All who took the Oregon Trail crossed the Platte near the junction of Deer Creek, though in 1849, numbers being large, various crossings in that neighborhood were used.

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across a succession of verdureless sand ridges. Yesterday's work in the water was followed by a restless night, but toward morning my symptoms of cholera were less apparent and for awhile after breakfast I felt better. Toward noon, however, the attack became acute, and in great distress I crept into the wagon. Dr. Callaman gave me some medicine, but the painful crampings continued, accompanied with a cold perspiration. When the train stopped for dinner I was laid on the ground, and the doctor, with the help of two men, pressed the distorted, cramped portions of my body into their natural shape. After this painful treatment, and drinking a quantity of hot tea, a man took me by either arm, balanced me on my feet, walked with me until my perspiration became warm and the cramping ceased. I was now able to walk alone, but greatly debilitated, with an acute soreness where the cramps had been, and feeling a general lassitude. Traveled about nineteen miles and camped in an aspen grove near the Platte.

Tuesday, July 2. Slept well during the night. Feel the effects of yesterday's illness by soreness, weakness, and a great desire to rest. Near our camp the bluff terminates at the river by a perpendicular bank, across which is a thick stratum of coal.

Toward noon we reached the upper ferry of the Platte and entered the trail over which the entire emigration traveled, and for the first time fully realized how great

was the tide. While many were waiting to cross the ferry, an almost continuous line of wagons filled the road, and few of the travelers, if any, had definite knowledge of the country in advance. Like making the voyage of life, we may not go back and travel the road over again, and so profit by our experience.

Turning from the river across a sandy slope, we were soon on a sea of white sand, rippled by the wind into glittering waves, destitute of vegetation, not even producing the dwarf sage. Toward night we descended through a steep, dry valley, but the water course in the center was dry and crusted over with salt, and the slopes around afforded no grass. Hoping to find food for our teams we hurried on, and at dark came to a mineral spring, of which we had been warned as being poisonous. Near this we found some short, saltish grass, and concluded to stop for the night.

Few of us had tasted water since leaving the river, and as the spring water, by the light of our lanterns, looked clear, our thirst overcame our fears, and we drank quite freely, nor did we experience any bad results. Although we used the water ourselves, we dared not allow the oxen the same privilege, as many oxen and horses lay near the spring, which, to all appearance, had died from its poisonous effects. The water, however, seems to have no bad qualities unless the black, malodorous sediment is mixed with it, when it is no doubt poisonous. But the

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flow of the water was so small, and the banks and bed so soft, that we found it impossible to collect even a small quantity of clear water for the teams.

Wednesday, July 3. At the dawn we started in search of water for our suffering teams. Our road wound among large rocks, and in places was almost blocked up with dead oxen, horses, and mules whose decomposition poisoned the air. In the forenoon our road passed for three-fourths of a mile between two parallel ledges of perpendicular rocks known as Rock Avenue,²⁰ and in about two miles crossed a low alkali swamp, from which arose such a nauseating odor that at times it seemed we could hardly escape suffocation. The wagons dragged heavily in the deep mire, and it was difficult to prevent the oxen from drinking the deadly slime.

The day was intensely hot, and as we ascended from the swamp by a long, rocky ridge, some of the oxen, exhausted and overcome with heat, lay down and were taken from the wagons and driven loose. This overburdened the others, but when we were about to leave the wagons and take the teams in search of water and food, we descended a steep bluff to a small stream of water, or more properly mud, for a short distance above were several hundred cattle and horses trampling in it. Ascending the brook a short distance we found a large spring

²⁰ Dalton, John E., Ms. Diary of 1852, California emigration, in St. Hist. Library, Madison, Wis., calls it *Avenue Rock*.

and pond of sulphurous water, and it was pleasant to see how it refreshed our teams.

Around this spring the ground appeared as having been once covered with grass, but now even the roots were trampled and dead. A little "bunch grass" was found on the slopes, which afforded a mere taste for the hungry oxen. This bunch grass grows in tufts among the rocks and sage, and becomes dry early in the season, but retains its nutriment.

As the grass at this place was very scarce, late in the afternoon we traveled up a winding ravine, came to several large springs and bunches of willows, but grass was equally scarce. So journeying over a high, mountain-like ridge, and turning left, half a mile from the road we found near a small brook a good supply of grass. Here we camped, using sage for fuel.

Thursday, July 4. Last night the boys of our camp made arrangements for celebrating Independence Day, and shortly after midnight an immense pile of dry sage was brought into the center of the camp and fired. After several volleys with rifles and pistols, we gave three hearty cheers, which were echoed back from neighboring trains, and even awakened a howl from the wolves on the cliff.

At the dawn we fired a national salute by volleys, and of course had an early start. Following down the narrow valley, we debouched into a wide, ashy plain, where the little brook, as if reluctant to leave its native hills,

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settled in a small slough beneath their shadow. Enveloped in a cloud of dust, the train moved slowly, stopping at Greasewood Creek to refresh the oxen with a few buckets of its yellow waters; then, through deep, hot sand, to the alkali swamps and ponds, a distance of six miles.

Around some of these ponds is a crust of pure, white saleratus, in places a foot in thickness, and resembling the most beautiful frost work. Many oxen and horses lay dead in this vicinity, poisoned by these alkaline waters, and all along our road, during the afternoon, their carcasses were strewn on either side.

About 3 P.M. we reached Sweetwater River and camped near Independence Rock,²¹ having traveled seventeen miles. The hot dust, mingled with saleratus, was almost suffocating to the drivers, and when the oxen came into camp, tears were trickling from their inflamed and swollen eyes. After drinking at the clear, cool rivulet, they were taken by the guards, across the plain to the bluffs, a distance of some miles, to obtain grass.

About ten in the evening, camp fires were replenished, and there arose a shout that rolled from camp to camp, until it died out in the distance. This was followed by the discharge of fire arms, which closed the celebration. The fires waned and the stillness of the night was broken only by a wolf's plaintive whine to the setting moon.

²¹ So named many years earlier by a party which also reached it July 4, the normal time considering its distance from the frontier and the usual time of setting out.

CHAPTER VII

Up the Sweetwater to South Pass

FRIDAY, July 5. Remained at camp to rest and recruit the teams. Independence Rock is a vast block of white granite, which by some freak of nature has been forced into the midst of a wide, sandy plain. It is six hundred yards long, one hundred and twenty wide, and over one hundred feet high,²² rising almost perpendicular from the plain. Many of the travelers immortalize their names by carving them high on its flinty surface.²³ The Sweetwater bends around its southern base, mirrors the rock, and soon disappears among the steep hills below. A barren plain extends from the river north to a chain of mountain-like rocks; and a few dwarf cedars on the southern hills are the only trees in sight. Crossing the plain this afternoon to relieve the guard, I saw several ponds of alkali, one of which must have covered an area of several miles and was encircled with a snowy fringe of soda.

²² Fremont says, 1842, that it is 650 yards long and 40 high. On his return August 23, he engraved on the rock the cross, symbol of the Christian faith, which apparently our traveler did not see.

²³ Hundreds of these were still legible thirty years ago, as the editor can testify.

UP THE SWEETWATER TO SOUTH PASS

Saturday, July 6. This morning our train forded the Sweetwater at Independence Rock, and diverging from the river across a low, sage-covered plain, in about five miles rounded the spur of a mountain ridge and on the north side bore off toward the river. Here R. McCord and I left the train, and following along the base of the spur on the south side, in about a mile reached the river where it passes through the mountain between perpendicular walls of granite fifteen rods apart and over five hundred feet²⁴ high, known as the Devil's Gate.

Before reaching the river we passed an abandoned wagon. Probably most of the horses died in the alkali region and the owners had been compelled to take only such things as could be packed on the remaining ones. It looked like a splendid outfit, piles of nice harness lay bleaching in the sun and rain; and under the wagon lay a faithful watch dog, dying at his post. When we touched any article, he showed his teeth, and with a low growl gave us to understand that he was on guard. I doubt whether he was able to stand, but he would not be

²⁴The estimate is probably too great by 100 to 200 feet. The Mormon Pioneers, 1847, measured the east cliff with the barometer, making it 399 feet, $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches. The west cliff is slightly higher. *Clayton's Journal*, 255. Fremont in 1842, estimated the height at 400 feet. George Kellogg estimates the walls to be 200 feet high! Major Cross thought them 500 feet high. Lienhard (1846) described them as 60–80 feet high! Dr. John E. Dalton, 1852, placed the height at 400 feet. He climbed the higher of the two cliffs—the one which faces the left bank.

coaxed, and we had not the heart to shoot him, so we left him to his fate.

After entering the Devil's Gate and passing some distance up the river, we undertook to climb the cliff on the southwest side. Creeping cautiously up and clinging to the projecting points, we ascended about three hundred feet, when, to advance, we were compelled to work our way up the smooth surface of a sloping rock. In this we were assisted by a small crevice at the junction of the slope with the main cliff, but before we could reach the shelf above, or find a comfortable position, a furious hailstorm swept down the river, and for two hours (it seemed many hours), we lay on the rock's smooth surface, and pressed our fingers into the crevice to prevent being blown off. There was no alternative; we dared not move from our painful position. The wind howled through the cañon, hurling pebbles, branches and dust into the air, smearing us with mud, while rain and hail beat upon us in merciless glee; but still we kept a death-like grip on the rocks.

When the storm subsided we renewed our efforts to reach the top. McCord, by rising on his toes, succeeded in reaching the shelf above, and with a little assistance, swung himself up. I now made the effort, but not being tall enough to reach the shelf, made a bold jump. My hands clasped the edge, and after vainly trying to swing myself up, my fingers relaxed, and, falling on the

DEVIL'S GATE



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smooth, wet rock, glided over its surface to the very edge of the awful precipice, where I found a small chink to which I clung, and was saved from a fall of over three hundred feet.

Creeping back to my former position I determined to descend; and with laborious care and utter exhaustion, finally reached the bottom, having no desire for further acquaintance either with the Devil or his Gate. McCord, however, reached the summit, and I believe he is the only person who ever succeeded in climbing it from this side.²⁵

Our train traveled only twelve miles and camped near the Sweetwater where a narrow strip produces good grass, but had been pastured very close. The main valley bears a large growth of sage, making very good fuel, but the leaves are too bitter for any animal to feed on.

Sunday, July 7. We moved up the river valley about twelve miles, on a broad, sandy flat, bearing a luxuriant growth of sage. On our right continues a chain of granite mountains rising, in some places, perpendicularly from the plain, crowned with majestic domes and spires which, gilded by the setting sun, point like firm, silent monitors to the sky. On the left rises a lofty mountain

²⁵ Clyman, James, *Diaries and Reminiscences*. Calif. Hist. Quarterly, IV, No. 2, pp. 135-136. Clyman spent about two weeks in the Sweetwater valley in 1824, and at one time climbed the cliffs of the cañon in order from that lookout to keep a watch on Indian foes. Of course, the Mormons had to climb the cliff to take the barometrical reading.

range, its sides mostly timbered with pine and cedar, while some of the highest peaks are crested with snow. Our altitude is indicated this evening by a chill in the air.

Monday, July 8. Starting at sunrise, near camp we crossed Cottonwood Creek, clear and cold, with quicksand bed. On its banks a few unneighborly cottonwood trees, the only timber yet found near the river. Traversing a barren plain, at noon we crossed the river and entered a deep cañon where between walls of white granite the Sweetwater ran in a clear, rippling current. Our road over a granite ledge, strewn with rocks, in half a mile recrossed the river, and turning north emerged from the cañon into a wide, sage-covered valley. Near the river grass was abundant, and finding a pile of driftwood, we once more enjoyed a cheerful camp fire.

But tonight an anxious feeling pervades all hearts; one of our number, Mr. Copeland, of Wisconsin, seems in the last stages of mountain fever.

Tuesday, July 9. Mr. Copeland's fever passed its crisis about midnight, and the dawn found him much better. In reaching the highlands we seem to have escaped cholera, but encounter mountain fever, which is hardly less fatal. It is liable to attack the most robust; begins like a cold, followed with fever and delirium, and runs its course in a very short time. The sick are in nearly every camp, and the numerous graves show its deadly work.

This morning the ground was covered with frost, but

the temperature of the air rose with the sun, and the day was soon quite hot.

Crossing the river we took our way over a verdureless, sandy plain. Captain Furry and I went in advance to visit a place called Icy Swamp, where, it was said, by digging two feet ice could be found. About noon we reached the place, a low, alkali swamp, where, at the depth of two feet, was a bed of something like potash which, doubtless, had been mistaken for ice. Here we found a wagon in the shade of which lay a young man suffering from fever. While his two companions were bringing the oxen, he told us that he had been sick over a week, and that he believed these two men intended to kill him, and thus obtain the outfit, which was his, they simply working their passage to California. Since his sickness they had refused to travel in company with others, and had treated him very unkindly. When they returned, one of them bawled out, "Come, Hank, tumble into the wagon."

We lifted him to the front of the wagon, when one of them, as if angry at our interference, seized him, and hurled him inside, where, with a deep groan, he fell upon his cot. We protested, and were answered with a volley of oaths. As we were unarmed, it seemed best not to reply, and the wagon was driven away. The young man appeared intelligent, and the ruffian-like actions and appearance of the men convinced us of the truth of his

statement. We therefore concluded to wait until our train came up, and then take our pistols and follow them, and either compel them to travel with us, or leave the wagon. As the sand was deep, it was late when the train arrived, and being joined by Mr. Matlock we started in pursuit. About an hour before sunset we reached the river, to which the road descended by a steep spur of the bluff. Half a mile distant we saw the object of our search. Hastening to the wagon we inquired for the sick man.

"He lies there," said one of the men, pointing to a ridge of freshly heaped earth.

Yes, he was dead and buried. We had strong suspicions that they had murdered him—possibly smothered him to death. To our questions they replied that he died in the wagon just before reaching the river; but their features and manners indicated guilt. Still he was beyond all human help, and we could only leave them to settle the matter with their final Judge.

Selecting a camping place, we gathered sage for fuel, but it was dark before our train arrived. Only sixteen miles travel, but it was hard on the teams, which were without water since morning, and the sand was deep, and at midday very hot. Our entire company felt indignant over the probable murder.²⁶ And it added to the

²⁶ Some overland companies provided a court or council to try offenders and decree punishments. See Schafer, J., *The Pacific Northwest*, pp. 152-153.

UP THE SWEETWATER TO SOUTH PASS

evidence of their guilt that the suspected men refused to give their names, or the name of him whom they had buried so hastily. It was therefore resolved to force an examination and, if possible, ascertain the names and addresses of all three; but, with the earliest dawn they were away, and I am not aware that we ever saw them again.

Wednesday, July 10. A white frost gemmed the few tufts of grass around our camp. The ground has the appearance of once being covered with luxuriant grass, but the tide of emigrant life has swept it away.

We broke camp and crossed the river about sunrise, and in four miles forded it again; but the grass in the narrow bottoms had been closely cropped the whole distance. Meanwhile, the ravines and gulches had been explored; and when one came reporting a patch of grass, the oxen were unhitched from the wagons, driven across the ridges to a small valley about two miles distant, and after feeding several hours were brought back and the journey resumed. Following up the river, and fording it twice at short intervals, at sunset we camped at the base of a high cliff, where the road takes its final leave of the Sweetwater. In a ravine near by we found plenty of grass for the tired and hungry teams.

Thursday, July 11. At 10 A.M. we left camp, and winding slowly up the rocky hill found several ponds of alkaline water on its summit. From there our road lay

across what seemed to be a level plain, but was really a succession of long prairie ridges extending north to a chain of snow-capped peaks. Between these ridges are deep chasms, cañons and gullies, where many of the emigrants in crossing have dashed in pieces their wagons, fragments of which were strewn among the rocks. In each of these channels is a stream of very pure, cold water. The uplands are covered with short, tufted grass and, occasionally, in some sheltered dell, are seen groves of quaking aspen.

We traveled but twelve miles and camped on a branch of the Sweetwater, and a bunch of willows furnished fuel. About one hundred yards from camp is a large snowbank, and the chill night air makes us shiver. All day we have had a grand view of the snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains, extending north as far as the eye could reach, and terminating at the South Pass.

Friday, July 12. At sunrise, when our train left camp, R. McCord and I set out to ascend a snow-covered peak toward the northwest which, as it seemed higher than any others in the range, we supposed was Fremont's Peak. Ascending toward the mountains we crossed an occasional snowbank; with each succeeding ridge they became more numerous and extensive, until snow covered almost the entire surface.

The snowbanks that faced the sun were slowly dissolving, and around each was a narrow space without

UP THE SWEETWATER TO SOUTH PASS

verdure; but fresh grass and bright flowers were constantly creeping toward the snow line, notwithstanding the frost, which chilled them every night. About noon we ascended the first peak or spur. Descending toward the northwest and starting for the next in the chain, we came suddenly to the brink of a cañon, only a few rods wide, but fully six hundred feet deep. Climbing to the bottom, where part of the side had fallen, we found a small rippling brook. Colossal figures, formed and polished by the mountain torrent, some of them a hundred feet in length, stood detached from the walls, or lay in broken fragments; and even the walls, arched and overhanging, were worn in wavy curves, as though along these banks some great river, for centuries, had rolled its tide. By the assistance of a massive column that leaned against the side of the cañon, at the mouth of a deep gulch, we made our exit to the snow-covered hills above. Climbing the steep snowbanks and belts of crumbling rock which encircled the mountain, we at last reached the summit of the next spur, which was much higher than the first. We now saw the folly of our undertaking. Fremont's Peak, the top of which seemed so near from the road, from our mountain view appeared several days' journey in the distance. However, we obtained a grand view of the road, with its long lines of emigrant wagons, the valley of the Sweetwater, the South Pass and Table Rocks.

The South Pass, instead of being a shadowy mountain gorge, is a broad and beautiful prairie, somewhat undulating, with here and there a snowbank glittering on its green surface. It extends about twenty miles south from these spurs to the Table Rocks, and falls off east and west, with a scarcely perceptible curve. Springs having their source in the same bank, here separate, the one through gorge, valley, and plain mingles with the dark Atlantic; the other goes forth to lave the sunlit corals of the Pacific. The Table Rocks rise about twelve hundred feet above the South Pass, southward; the top is apparently miles in extent and level as a floor, supported by immense cliffs, and inaccessible from the west; but there are places toward the Pass where a person may climb to the summit.

The sun was far down its western slope when we descended the spur and followed a long narrow ridge in the direction of the road. In the glens on either side grew fir trees, and as we reached lower and milder air, shady groves of quaking aspen appeared. On the prairie we shot an antelope, and each took what meat we could conveniently carry. The road, outlined by moving trains, was visible in the distance. We could even distinguish our own train, until about sunset it disappeared in a valley and, as we supposed, went into camp.

It was our hope to find an easy way across the prairie, but in this we were disappointed, being compelled to

UP THE SWEETWATER TO SOUTH PASS

cross several branches of the Sweetwater, which flow through cañons of great depth. As the twilight faded from the snow,

And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky,
we groped our way as best we could, and about midnight found our camp on a branch of the Sweetwater. The waning fires still flickered where our companions had heaped the willows, but we passed them by and entered our tent, being well prepared for rest.

Saturday, July 13. About three miles from camp, at nine in the forenoon, we crossed the summit of the famous South Pass, and with a prolonged cheer bade adieu to Nebraska, and hailed Oregon.²⁷

In three miles farther we reached Pacific Spring, and following down the watercourse, at noon camped near Pacific Creek. A broad, green meadow spreads out on either side. On the north bank are about one hundred white tents, with numerous wagons, and a multitude of horses and oxen feeding around them. On the opposite side, rising in majesty, cliff above cliff, are the Table Rocks. This place is entirely destitute of trees or willows, our fires being supplied with sage, obtained at the edge of a wide plain, toward the west. Here we found some men on their way east, receiving letters, which for fifty cents each, they promised to carry back to the

²⁷ At that time the Rocky Mountains formed the dividing line between Nebraska and Oregon.

“States.” It was *so* romantic to date a letter, *South Pass, Rocky Mountains*, that many availed themselves of the opportunity, and so far as I know, every letter reached its destination in safety.

CHAPTER VIII

The Sublette Cut-Off and Green River

BEING warned that from Pacific Creek to Little Sandy, some twenty miles, the road was dry and dusty, we resolved to take advantage of the cool night air and at sunset continued our journey. Here we parted with Mrs. Sherman, she having found friends in another company, and intended going by Salt Lake City. Our road was level and smooth and about midnight we crossed Dry Sandy, the channel containing only some ponds of stagnant water, and the wagons sinking deep in soft sand.

Aware that after crossing Dry Sandy the road forked, the right for Sublette's Cut-Off, and the left for Salt Lake City, and lest in the darkness our train might take the wrong road, Wm. Kingsbury and I went in advance to find the junction. Owing to the rank growth of sage all the wagons followed the same track, and of course, the dust was deep and suffocating; and besides this, many oxen and horses had died on the way, and it was difficult for us to avoid stumbling over the carcasses which lay near the road; and so, considering the darkness, and the

tainted, dust-laden air, neither of us desired to repeat that six miles' walk.

A little before dawn we found the junction, and the train halted, hoping that daylight might reveal a patch of grass. It was a vain hope; the sandy plain was dry, and produced only bunches of greasewood and sage. Taking Sublette's Cut-Off, in six miles, over the same barren waste, and the sun beaming from a cloudless sky, we came to Little Sandy. Found good water, plenty of large willows, but no grass. Three large trains were camped here, several of their number being sick, some of mountain fever, and one serious case of cholera.

We were told that grass could only be found by going a long distance up the river, and as I had been detailed to herd the oxen in the afternoon, and bring them in at night, I went out with the morning guard. We drove them several miles up the river, and found a wide valley, with an abundance of grass and willows. After the barren uplands, it was a kind of paradise for the oxen. George Matlock, the morning guard, had returned to camp, and late in the afternoon when rounding up the herd ready to return, the sound of a human voice arrested my attention. Passing in its direction, under the drooping branches of some tall willows, I found a man, apparently in the last stages of mountain fever. He was reclining on a blanket, raised a little from the ground by a pile of willow boughs, and talking in a low hollow tone.

Without noticing my approach, he talked on, evidently laboring under mental derangement.

There was such melancholy in his voice and features as he appealed to God for help or with deep pathos seemed addressing his wife, "I am so sorry, so sorry, but you know, darling, I want to help you." Then, as if addressing a comrade, "I'm sorry, Jim, I can't go on, so sorry, so sorry." All so sad, every word and tone touched the heart. It was the ravings of delirium, but invested with an awful reality.

Several cooking utensils lay near a smouldering fire, and while I was wondering whether he had been deserted to die thus alone, his partner, who had been after their horses, returned, and fastening them with long riatas near the camp, came with anxious solicitude. He bathed the sick man's temples, gave him such medicine as he had, and, while great tears rolled down his manly cheeks, told me the story of their misfortune.

James Pierce and Willis Brown were from Independence, Missouri. While crossing the cañons at the head of the Sweetwater they had broken their wagon, and packing their provisions and clothing on their two horses, traveled on foot, and four days ago came up in search of grass, when Brown was stricken with fever, and had been delirious all day. It was nearly sunset when, with reluctance, I left them and started with the oxen for camp. Arriving late in the evening

I learned that another victim of cholera had been laid in his grave, a young man belonging to a train from Missouri, who died soon after our arrival this morning.

As our train was ready to move with the dawn, I reported the case of Pierce and his sick companion to the Missouri company, whose teams were somewhere in the same valley, and they promised to hunt them up and do what they could for Brown. That night as I lay down to sleep, again and again that scene under the willows, of the dying man and his friend's lonely vigil, came to my mind; but what his fate was I never learned.

Monday, July 15. At an early hour we forded Little Sandy; four rods wide and two feet deep. In six miles, over a level plain, marked by an occasional pyramid of sandstone, we reached Big Sandy River and camped to make preparations to cross a desert between this and Green River, said to be thirty-five miles wide but which, to our distress, we found to be fifty-three. As there was no grass near the road, the oxen were taken several miles up the river.

Near sunset, while all were preparing supper, a dense cloud suddenly arose from the desert, filling the western sky, and obscuring the sun. Yet, at our camp all was still; not a breath fanned the fires or dimpled the river; while the rolling mountain-like mass moved on, over-arching the camp like a frowning cliff, and the next instant, a vast volume of sand and dust swept through the

camp. Every tent was prostrated, covers torn from some of the wagons, and our supper utterly ruined.

After the first blast, the tempest decreased in violence, but for over an hour the simoon-like surges showered the hot ashes upon us. There was no rain, only a dry, suffocating gas, which left us strangely debilitated. All complained of the cruel fortune which spoiled our supper. It was difficult to cleanse the dishes, with the river current now changed to mud, and prepare another supper. Some tried it, but most simply shook the sand from their blankets, and tried to sleep.

Tuesday, July 16. This morning the sun rose clear, but the scene was one of cheerless monotony. Neither tree nor willow relieved the eye, the river glided by in silence, and our gaze was met on all sides by the dull, gray sand of the desert. In order to avoid the noonday heat the oxen were not brought in until four in the afternoon, when we forded the river, six rods wide and two feet deep.

Our road lay across a perfectly level plain, almost entirely destitute of vegetation, with an occasional isolated sand rock. In about eight miles we halted to rest the teams and take supper, after which we hurried on hoping to reach Green River by daybreak. Our road still continued level, but we encountered a large growth of sage, compelling all the wagons to follow the same track from which the dust, moved by the oxen's feet, floated

in dense, suffocating clouds. However, keeping the wagons a long distance apart, we moved on. Toward morning the road became uneven and rocky, and after daylight, finding among the rocks small clusters of bunch grass, we unyoked the oxen to feed, while we also took breakfast.

Our little company presented a grotesque appearance, face, hands and clothes of the same shade, clearly of the earth earthy. Eyes inflamed and swollen, were only rubbed open to receive their due proportion of dust from the hands. We had but little water left, and it would not do to waste it in washing.

Our breakfast had been cooked before leaving Big Sandy, and we sat on the rocks among the sage sad, sullen, and silent, devouring the dusty bread and bacon, and sipping our cold coffee, the sand meanwhile grating between our teeth. Occasionally, as someone's teeth glanced on a flinty grain, the silence would be broken by a volley of bitter imprecations against the dust, the desert, the expedition, the gold mines, the treaty of annexation, the Mexican war, extending through President Polk's administration. Each link in the great chain of events which brought us to our miserable plight, being separately brought under the withering anathema.

We were now about twenty-eight miles from Big Sandy, and, according to our mistaken calculation, but seven from Green River, and consequently could easily

reach it before the heat of the day. The oxen had suffered greatly from dust during the night, so giving them all the water we had, soon after sunrise we were again under way, all unconscious of the fact that we had yet twenty-five miles of desert road before reaching Green River.

Captain Furry and I hurried on in advance. The appearance of the country had greatly changed, the road crossing a succession of high, steep, rocky, and burned-looking ridges for the remainder of the distance to the river. A great number of oxen, horses, and mules lay dead beside the road whose decay seemed to poison the hot air. Many, however, were still alive and suffering all the tortures of a lingering death by starvation and thirst. As we approached, they would look imploringly at us and make vain efforts to stand. Their owners, no doubt, thinking they were near Green River, intended to return to their relief with food and water.

At noon the heat, especially in the valleys, became terrible, and we ascended each succeeding ridge, hoping to see the river, but it was not until three in the afternoon that from a high ridge, we saw its broad, green valley and bright waters about three miles distant.

Our tongues seemed dry, and we were much fatigued, but at the sight we quickened our pace. Suddenly Furry stopped, and the next moment lay senseless on the hot sand. I dragged him into the shadow of a large rock; he

was deathly pale, and to all outward appearance a dead man. Raising his shoulders, I found that his heart still beat, and just then a strong breeze swept around us under whose influence consciousness returned. He complained of feeling sick, and said he would lie in the shade until the train arrived. As I could be of no more service, I hurried on, and at last reached the long wished for river.

After bathing my hands and face, I pulled off my shoes and plunged into the clear, cool current. What a luxury! Perhaps I never before knew what an excess of pleasure could be realized in the hydropathic process. Under its influence fever and filth at once depart. In the cleft of a high rock that overhung the river I wrung the water from my clothes, and then came out into the hot sun to dry.

The road from the desert highland followed down a ravine, in which ran a small brook of strong alkali, and many teams, after the desert journey, had died from drinking this water, as indicated by their carcasses.

A short distance below where the road reaches the river, a small cove was crowded with people, wagons and tents; and a ferry busily engaged in taking them across the river. On the west side spread out a broad, green flat, medallioned with alkali ponds, and bounded by gray sand hills. Further down the river, dark lines of timber approached, and overhung its western bank.

THE SUBLETTE CUT-OFF AND GREEN RIVER

Borrowing a canteen, I filled it with water and started to relieve Captain Furry, but met him in the ravine, within a mile of the river, walking very slowly, his face bloodless, and feeling, as he said, "Pretty much used up."

It was nearly dark when our train arrived, both men and teams suffering terribly with thirst. They moved half a mile below the ferry, and camped in a small cove. There was but little grass, but we were afraid to drive the oxen across the river in the night, lest they might be poisoned with alkali, so we guarded them near our camp. Our oxen were all brought safely through, but the common error that the distance was only thirty-five miles, instead of fifty-three, caused many to lose their teams, when correct information would have saved them.²⁸

Thursday, July 18. With the dawn breakfast was over, the tents struck, and we commenced ferrying the wagons, which occupied about two hours. The oxen then swam safely to the western bank, and a guard of four, I being one, drove them away in search of grass. Above the ferry, and about three miles from the river, we found a large valley bearing a tall growth of grass and flax, while a clear, cold stream, fringed with alders flowed through the center; and on all sides, except toward the

²⁸ The Californians of the previous year discovered that desert stretch to be at least fifty miles. Delano, A., *Life on the Plains*, p. 120, calls it fifty-four miles and says the guide books make it thirty miles. Cross calls the distance fifty miles. The Cut-Off was a new road in 1849, having been opened the previous year.

river, it was inclosed with an almost perpendicular wall of rock, in many places festooned with garlands of vines and flowers.

This was the native home of the beaver. Across the creek were numerous dams, one extending quite across the valley, showing where considerable trees had been gnawed down and neatly trimmed with their teeth; and also arranged with wonderful engineering skill.

The relief guard failed to find us until about dark when, glad to return, we found our camp nicely arranged on the west bank of the river.

Passing the alkali ponds we found many oxen and horses that had died from drinking the water, and we notice that it is not always thirst which tempts them to drink the poison. They drink it with the same relish that a toper takes his whiskey, and as reason fails in the case of the toper, so instinct fails with the animal, and the drink does its deadly work. Soon after drinking alkali the animal becomes averse to exercise, stands in a hump-backed position, bloats, lies down and dies. Some were saved by pouring melted lard into the stomach immediately after taking the poison.²⁹ But after a little delay there seemed to be no remedy.

Friday, July 19. Wishing to give the teams time to rest and recruit after their severe desert journey, the camp was not moved, and I spent the day in exploring

²⁹ Vinegar was another remedy often found efficacious.

GREEN RIVER FERRY



THE SUBLETTE CUT-OFF AND GREEN RIVER

the river and bluffs. While a number of us were wading the river, among some islands, a short distance below our camp, we found the body of a man who had been drowned a few days since, and had drifted under the tall grass that fringed the upper extremity of the island. He was not recognized by any one, nor was there anything on his person by which we could determine his name or residence. His hair was long and flaxen and, judging from his features, he was probably a German. We buried him on a small mound on the west bank of the river, where five others who had shared a like fate had been laid. The river is about two hundred yards wide, but owing to the swift current and low temperature many good swimmers have lost their lives in attempting to cross.

A mile below our camp is the old ford, but at present the water is too high for wagons to cross. Below this about a mile, and half a mile from the river, we found the camp of two mountaineers, Baker and McDonald. They had three very good ferry boats, but owing to indolence or indifference, they were lying idle, while at the ferry above, a great many emigrants were detained, waiting their turn to get their wagons across. Here too was an abundance of grass, on both sides of the river, and a splendid camping place among cottonwood trees on the west bank.

The mountaineers proposed that if one of our company would go out on the road and direct the emigrants

down the river, and another assist them with the boats, they would commence ferrying at once. At the upper ferry the charge for crossing a wagon was seven dollars, but, as we would expect the emigrants to do the rowing, we would charge but five, and share the profits equally. Captain Furry and I acceded to this proposal, and it was agreed to begin operations in the morning.

Saturday, July 20. The tents were struck at an early hour, the oxen brought in, and the journey resumed by sunrise. Captain Furry went out on the desert road, and I shouldered my blanket and went down to the mountaineer's ferry. Soon the emigrants, who had been waiting, came filing down the river, and we began work. With three boats fit for service, Baker, McDonald, and I each steered a boat, and the emigrants, with poles and paddles, pushed them across.

The boats were made of cottonwood logs, flattened to about six inches in thickness, and sixteen feet long; sides of the same material, eighteen inches deep and sloped at each end, so that some broad cross bars fastened to these slopes supported the ends of the bottom pieces and not only held the boat firmly together but enabled it to rise safely on the great swells of the swift current. In the afternoon there fell a heavy shower, and the air became quite cold.

Captain Furry came down in the evening to the mountaineer's camp, where we took supper, which was

prepared by the squaws, after the Indian style; and consisted of thin cakes made of flour, a luxury, they said, seldom enjoyed; with dried venison and buffalo which two latter, though said to be nutritious, were about as moist and palatable as the sole of your shoe. As with my hunting knife I sliced the veneer from the old buffalo junk its resemblance to Honduras mahogany suggested a wooden supper.

James Baker, the more sociable of the two, and forty-two years of age, said that at the age of seventeen he started with a hunting party for Oregon but, losing his companions, he fell in with a band of Shoshone Indians, was kindly treated, remained with them several years, and then returned to his birthplace in Illinois. Not finding his kindred, the family having removed, he knew not whither, and becoming dissatisfied with the manners and customs of the whites, he returned to the Indians, among whom, he said, it was his intention to live and die. He had two wives, a Shoshone and a Ute. As these tribes were frequently at war, by being thus connected with each, he could be neutral and remain in comparative safety. He had a numerous family and, in the un-circumscribed limit of his wild home, seemed perfectly happy. Bigotry or avarice found no place in his heart; the jarring interests of society were unheard. Surrounded by his little circle of faithful, unflattering friends, the days come and go unnoticed, and when his

mortality shall resign its trust, the sigh of the trembling leaves will sing his requiem and fading, fall on his grave.³⁰

Of McDonald I could learn but little. He said he had been five years among the mountains, but appeared averse to talk of himself. He had three wives, one Shoshone and two Utes.

These men were kind and hospitable in their manners, much like Indians. They gave us many interesting incidents of mountaineer life like Baker's hunting stories, and especially the story of an expedition into Mexico during our war with that country in which, with a band of Indians, he succeeded in capturing and bringing away about one thousand cavalry horses which had been collected for the Mexican army.

In summer they rove among the mountains, and in winter go into Brown's Hole, a deep valley some distance down the river, or to some other place, where there falls but little snow. The outdoor life and mountain air promotes perpetual health, and almost daily contact with wild animals and savage men seems to give them an utter contempt of danger. The children were very bright and active, but rather shy of us, and I noticed that when one became sleepy, wherever it was,

³⁰ Had this train not followed Sublette's Cut-Off, they would have passed Fort Bridger and might have seen, not far from where they then were, in the mountaineer Jim Bridger a more celebrated character of that type than Baker.

it lay down and slept. And sometimes, after dark, there would be a general search for the younger children, and they would be found by spring, or pond, or tree, wherever sleep overtook them.

The general residence was a large tepee, made of nicely dressed buffalo skins. A fire was built in the center, the smoke ascending through a hole at the top, where a flap of skin, adjusted according to the wind, by a long pole outside, prevented the tepee from filling with smoke. Around the fire, but close against the side of the tepee, branches were placed on the ground, and on these were laid buffalo robes, bearskins, etc., furnishing seats by day, and beds by night. Besides this, there were several smaller tents pitched near by; and while all seemed equally to use the large tepee, each woman had her own tent for herself and family.

Sunday, July 21. This afternoon as I strolled among the trees along the river, twelve Shoshone warriors, mounted on small, jaded horses, dashed fiercely from a thicket, surrounded me, and began talking with great earnestness. Of course, I could not understand a word, but McDonald being in sight, came to my relief, and immediately invited them to his camp. He told me that they were engaged in war with the Utes, and yesterday had suffered a dreadful defeat; they were flying before their enemies, and wanted me to conduct them to some white man's camp where they could obtain food.

As they approached the tepee, McDonald's Shoshone wife came out to meet them. After exchanging a few words with one who I learned was her brother, and being told that another brother had been killed yesterday in battle, her eyes filled with tears, and with piteous lamentation she retired to her little tent.

Provisions were furnished, and after a brief halt they galloped away up the river, hoping to reach their village on the Lewis Fork before they were overtaken by the Utes, who they supposed were in close pursuit.

At supper time McDonald went into the tent where the squaw, Mrs. Shoshone McDonald, was still weeping, and persuaded her to come into the tepee. He wiped the tears from her cheeks and tried to comfort her; and she, with great effort, tried to overcome her grief; but at times she would sob as though her heart was breaking, and her eyes again fill with tears. As she reclined in his arms she was really beautiful; her black, glossy hair hanging in careless ringlets about her cheeks; and the tender and sad expression of her large, dark eyes, gave evidence of a true and affectionate heart.

McDonald's Ute wives did not appear at supper. Whether they were holding a jubilee over the success of their brothers in battle, or were afraid of the vengeful sympathy which the weeping Shoshone might excite in the heart of their common husband I could not even guess; but it seemed quite certain that there could be

little harmony in the household while the brothers-in-law were thus seeking each other's life. And what can be the fraternal love of children, recognizing the same father, but trained by mothers who are deadly enemies? Alas for the family!

This evening a company of Missourians complained of not finding grass for their teams. I accordingly piloted their guard, with the oxen, through the timber to a small brook and prairie where grass was abundant. As the guard was alone, I remained with him until three in the morning, when we returned to camp for the relief. He who had been detailed for this duty was seated on an inverted water bucket by a smouldering fire. At first he said he was ready, but after a few minutes hesitation, remarked: "I wish some one would take my place, for I believe the cholera has got hold of me."

The guard with whom I had come, spreading down his blankets in a tent close by, replied, "Just as I expected, but you may go to —— before I'll stand guard for you one minute." Without making any reply, he rose up and prepared to depart. I had replenished the fire and was preparing to take a nap beside it, when it flamed up, and the view I obtained of his features convinced me that there was no affectation in his sickness. I therefore interposed, saying, "I'll go in your place; I think you had better keep out of the wet grass." He was pleased with the proposal, and promised to fire a gun as

a signal to bring the oxen to camp. It was already dawn when I reached the herd, but the sun arose, hour after hour passed, and still no signal. I became impatient, supposing I would be needed at the ferry, and finally gathered the herd and started with it to camp. On the way I was met by several of the company, who said they had been detained by the burial of one of their companions, who died this morning about eight. He was the same for whom I had taken the guard. In a few painful hours death had stricken him. Going to the ferry I passed his grave, in the deep, cool shade of the woods. A small board at the head, bore the penciled inscription,

BARTON GWIN, DIED JULY 22ND, 1850.

CHAPTER IX

Across Desert and Mountain to Bear Valley

THIS forenoon we ferried a large train, and at the same time several wagons forded the river in safety. As the river had become fordable, it was useless for us to remain. We therefore procured buckskin pantaloons and moccasins, and bidding farewell to our mountaineer friends, started to overtake our train. I never saw either of them again, but in *The Chicago Record* of May 20, 1898, saw a notice of Baker's death. He died in the early part of May, 1898, at his home on Snake River, Routt County, Colorado, where he had lived since 1873, having reached the age of about ninety years. For over seventy years he had lived in the Rocky Mountains, well known to both Indians and whites, and with the exception of Kit Carson, "Jim Baker" was the most famous scout, trapper, Indian fighter and guide in all that region. The facts of his life were more wonderful than any fiction.³¹ McDonald was much younger than Baker, and I do not know whether he still survives.

³¹ Biography in *Dict. Am. Biog.* I.

Leaving Green River valley we crossed some high, rocky ridges, on which we were overtaken by a terrific thunder storm, and as we descended into the valley of Black River, clouds came rolling up the slopes so dense that a hydropathist might have used them for a shower bath, and wet sheets; we, however, lost all the pleasure of the health-promoting process in the chill produced by our wet and clinging buckskin outfit, which utterly disgusted us with the fashions of this part of the country.

Rounding a bold mountain spur, and proceeding up the river about four miles, at the crossing of Black River, we found the camp of Mr. Estus and family of Iowa, who were on their way to Oregon. They had been detained at Green River, and like ourselves were anxious to overtake their train. We camped with them, and the merry prattle and cheerful faces of the children were like music and sunshine, the home life making us forget the wild surroundings until, with a scream, the children ran to their mother as a band of fifteen mounted Ute warriors, armed with dragoon swords and rifles, came thundering up to the tent. Halting a moment, they eyed us with a scrutinizing glance, and then with a word from their leader, swept furiously up the valley. We were entirely at their mercy, and it was a relief to see them go.

Tuesday, July 23. We bade Mr. Estus and family goodbye and hurried on. Our road lay across a succession of rocky, sage-covered ridges; brooks and springs

were frequent, with abundant grass and wild flax in the valleys. In the afternoon, by easy slopes, bearing short grass, interspersed with wild flax now in bloom, we ascended the summit ridge of the Bear River mountains. Groves of pine and aspen appeared in the glens, pines were prevalent on the heights, and above all the broad slopes of perennial snow were gilded with the setting sun. At nightfall we camped by a spring near a large company of emigrants, from whom we obtained some bacon and bread for supper and breakfast.

Wednesday, July 24. With the dawn we crawled from our bed, merely a pile of leaves under an aspen tree, and kindling a fire, broiled our bacon on wooden forks, allowing the drippings to fall on our bread, and with a cup of water from the spring, made out a very good breakfast. When ready to pursue our journey, we were attracted by a group of people at a tent. The sides were drawn up, and upon a cot, raised a little from the ground, was an old man, his white locks trembling in the wind as he labored in the final struggle with death. Scarcely a change passed over his pallid countenance as his spirit took its flight—another victim of cholera. But one of the sad things in this case was the fact, as told us by his companions, that while he had a wife and family in Illinois, he had not a relative in the company.

A warm flood of sunlight submerged the hills as we hurried away for the snowy summit of the mountain.

Where the road crosses is a small grove of fir trees, from which the surrounding country presents a scene which defies the descriptive power of language. Snowy peaks, broken ridges, deep gorges, groves, meadow slopes and cliffs appeared on all sides.

The road descends by a shoulder of the mountain, at an angle of about forty degrees, into a narrow, wooded valley, through which a beautiful creek flows from the cliffs above. On its banks we found three newly made graves. The plaintive lull of the waterfall, and the sigh of the deep woods, blend in singing over them a ceaseless dirge. From this valley we crossed a high mountain chain, running parallel with the summit ridge, and descended by a long ravine, that gradually widened in its serpentine course until it opened into the valley of the Bear River.

Here we found part of our train. Mr. Young having been taken sick was compelled to stop, and consequently he and his mess were supposed to be somewhere in the rear; but I was kindly entertained by Mr. Shimmans and his companions. Their camp was near the river, in the midst of a fertile valley, and overlooked on either side by snow-capped peaks.

Thursday, July 25. When the train moved on, I remained, hoping my mess would arrive during the forenoon. As they did not come, and I had been told that they might have passed the train yesterday at noon, I

started forward on the trail, and in about five miles found on a staff a note addressed to me stating that they had camped at this place last night. Elated with the information, I hurried on, hoping to overtake them before dark. In a short distance the road turned from the river, and crossing a succession of mountain spurs, again descended into the valley of the river. Here, at the base of the mountain, I found the whole company encamped, Mr. Young having nearly recovered from his illness. They had been joined by two wagons, one, a part of Mr. Estus' train, a family from Iowa, on their way to Oregon; the other, also from Iowa, belonged to Thomas Hunt, Anderson Tade and Drury Farley, who accompanied us to California.

Friday, July 26. Three miles across a beautiful plain brought us to Bear River, where a halt was made to allow the teams to drink and rest. Here a Shoshone came with a roll of buckskins to barter for knives, beads, etc. He understood scarcely a word of common English, but seemed able to repeat with great fluency the entire vocabulary of profane English. I suppose in listening to the teamsters he remembered their most emphatic words. He evidently had no idea that he was swearing, and seemed surprised that we did not understand our own language. We realized how utterly foolish swear words were, and resorted to the silent, but more intelligent, pantomime.

From this point we turned north, down the river, and in about six miles stopped for dinner on the bank of a large creek from which, with hook and line, we caught a supply of beautiful mountain trout. During the afternoon we crossed several small creeks, and at sunset camped by a mountain torrent. The valley is one great meadow, medallioned with flowers, the creeks fringed with willow and alder, and the mountain sides timbered with stately pines, almost to the region of snow. Altogether, the scene is one of grandeur and beauty.

Saturday, July 27. This morning there was trouble in camp. All the oxen were out of sight, and the guard fast asleep in his wagon. I had been on guard in the early part of the night, and was blamed for not waking my successor, Captain Furry, whose watch commenced at midnight. However, I was relieved of the charge by Mr. Matlock, who was preparing medicine for Mr. Young, when I entered camp; and he stated that I not only awakened, but saw him out of the wagon before I retired. Instead of going on duty, however, Captain Furry had crept into the wagon, where he was still sleeping. Without disturbing the delinquent we mustered for the search, and in about two hours found all the oxen in the thickets at the foot of the mountain. But while engaged in the search we found several dead oxen, killed some days since, pierced with arrows and spears, and portions of the flesh sliced off and carried away, evidently the work of Indians.

Realizing the danger to which not only the oxen, but ourselves, had been exposed, through the neglect of the guard, our indignation was intensified. The oxen were driven into camp, where the guard still slumbered, not dreaming of the storm which awaited his waking. Delay was no longer possible, and the bolted thunder exploded in a shout that rolled him, almost instantly, from the wagon. In amazement, fear and shame, he forgot all apologies and met the storm without a word. Doubtless much might be said why a person would not wish to be tumbled out of his warm quiet sleep, to wade shoulder deep in the chilly, dew-moistened grass, and expose his head as a target, tempting the wily Indian to a trial of his skill.

We were late in leaving camp, but found a pleasant road down the valley, crossing frequent clear, cold streams, and at times passing over a mountain spur. At noon we halted among some trees near a large spring. Here were several families on their way to Oregon, one of whom this morning had lost a little child by cholera.

All the preparations for the funeral had been completed; it lay in a little crib by the tent door, amid a profusion of wild flowers. Death had been so sudden that the arms and cheeks were still plump and beautiful as in life. The eyes, closed as in natural slumber, seemed ready, at the slightest sound, to open and light up the smile which still lingered upon its lips. But the parents could not make up their minds to consign the little form

to the dust, and bid adieu to the sacred place, and so, in kindly sympathy, the company waited. It was late in the afternoon when they assembled around the grave; prayer was offered, and a hymn sung, closing with the following lines,

By thy hands the boon was given;
 Thou hast taken but thine own;
 Lord of earth, and God of heaven,
 Evermore, Thy will be done.

The body was lowered, the grave tastefully heaped and marked; the heartbroken parents turned away and, with the weeping company, pursued their journey.

This afternoon we crossed several steep ridges, and finding some springs at the head of a small brook, along which was an abundance of grass and clover, although we had traveled but four miles, we resolved to stop and rest during the Sabbath. Near our camp we found great quantities of bright red currants, of most delicious flavor.

Sunday, July 28. Messrs. Shimmans and Furry, with their companions, went on to the Beer and Soda springs this morning. But the mountain rocks and stony road were making the oxen's feet tender, and most of the company preferred to rest where our teams had abundant food; something we were not sure of at the famous springs. While out on the forenoon watch I found a large spring of warm alkaline water, quite transparent, and welling up through a thick crust of calcareous rock.

CHAPTER X

Soda Springs to Pilot Peak

MONDAY, July 29. With the dawn we were again on our journey, and about noon, after crossing a deep, clear, cold creek, we reached the famous Beer and Soda springs. The Beer Springs were a little north of the road, on an elevation formed by accretion from the water, which oozed out in many places around the sides and at the top, where were many columns, some of which rose to the height of five or six feet, being from one to three in diameter. And on the top of each, a basin shaped cavity, full to the brim, with the "beer," which flowed from a small orifice in the center. It resembled real beer in color, but had a strong metallic taste. The Soda spring was on the opposite side of the road, on a small mound, in the basin of a rock, and about three feet in diameter. It foamed and sparkled, and its metallic taste left a trace of alum on the tongue.

For a mile west of these were innumerable small springs, of various colors, some of which were quite warm, but all having the same metallic taste. About two miles west of the Beer and Soda springs, near the bank

of Bear River, where the road crosses a rocky spur, we found the Steamboat Spring, a stream of warm, clear water from a fissure in the rock, accompanied by an intermittent flow of gas, with a noise which has a fancied resemblance to the puffing of a steamboat. The gas is said to be genuine laughing gas, but we were not inclined to test its properties.

Among these springs we found an encampment of Canadian Indians, with whom, much to our surprise, we saw a middle-aged white woman. Her blue eyes and light hair contrasted strangely with the swarthy complexion, black hair and eyes of her husband. We were not greatly astonished to find white men, like Baker and McDonald, living with Indians, and adopting their habits; but to me it seemed impossible that any white woman could ever, voluntarily, take up such a life, and at first I supposed she must have been a captive. She, however, assured Dr. Callaman that her mode of life was purely a matter of choice and affection. Her husband, a French and Indian half blood, had always pursued the Indian life in its widest range, and with woman's devotion and love, she had abandoned kindred, home, and civilization, and sharing the danger and privation of his uncertain camp, had wandered with him more than twenty years.

She said they had roamed from Hudson's Bay to the Gulf of Mexico; like the birds, going south in winter, and

STEAM BOAT SPRING



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north in summer. A number of Indians traveled with them and took charge of a large herd of horses which they owned. Her native tongue was French but, besides several Indian dialects, she spoke English and Spanish. She said that they made it a point to visit these springs as often as possible, owing to the medicinal properties of the water. No wonder they wish to linger by these fountains, under the cool shade of juniper and cedar, in the broad, green valley, and unsurpassed grandeur of mountain scenery.

The river after running thus far nearly due north, here bends gracefully beneath the mountain battlement, and runs almost due south; the mountain itself, standing like a great wall, rising nearly perpendicular into the sky. Five miles west of Steamboat Spring we left the Oregon trail, which here turns north by way of Fort Hall, in the valley of the Lewis Fork of the Columbia River; and the emigrants destined for the Willamette Valley, took this road.³²

Here we parted with Mr. and Mrs. Hayden who had traveled with us from the frontier of Iowa. She was the last lady left in our company. One by one they had turned from our road, and we did exceedingly regret to part with one so worthy of our highest respect. Her

³² Formerly many California emigrants took the Fort Hall road, with the Oregonians, and turned off from it up Raft River. The Delano party, in 1849, did so. *Life on the Plains*, pp. 142-145.

presence had maintained an atmosphere of refinement and courtesy in the camp. The turbulent would guard himself, and the profane or angry word, unuttered, would be forgotten. Saying goodbye to Mrs. Hayden seemed like giving up the charter of peace, for there is no influence to promote order and decorum like the presence of a pure-minded woman.

Turning from the Fort Hall road, and following Hedpath's [Hudspeth's]³³ Cut-off, we struck out into a wide plain, beyond which could be seen a chain of snowy mountains. Across this plain were chasms, in places about ten feet wide, and of unknown depth, radiating from the extinct crater of a volcano, about three hundred yards in diameter, and fifty feet deep, the glazed sides perpendicular. We camped in the midst of this plain, but owing to the absence of wood and water, there was a lack of the usual good cheer.

Tuesday, July 30. This morning it was discovered that one of Mr. Dowson's oxen, without apparent sickness or injury of any kind, had died; and there was much concern lest others might become victims of the same mysterious fate. But as there was no evidence of sickness among the rest, we started at the dawn, and crossing

³³ Also called Myer's Cut-Off. Turnbull took that route in 1852. Map. So did Dalton, who calls it Meyers or Bear River Cut-Off. Delano called it Hudspeth's Cut-Off and gives some particulars about its discovery. *Life on the Plains*, p. 159. Dr. James L. Lowry, 1860, calls it Hudspeth's Cut-Off.

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the plain, ascended by a long, circling ridge to the region of snow. Here we met a band of traders and Shoshone Indians on their way to Bear River. They were neatly clothed in buckskin and buffalo dress, ornamented with porcupine quills, dyed red and blue; rode good horses, and showed themselves expert and fearless riders. A squaw, said to be a trader's wife, mounted on a large black horse, her dress glimmering in every fold with tinsel trimmings, came down the mountain on a bounding gallop, overleaping rock, bush and chasm, as she neared a perpendicular rock belt and we held our breath in horror at her inevitable doom. She reached the cliff, trembled not a moment on its brink, swayed from sight, and reappeared half way to the valley. We felt like giving her three cheers.

From the mountain summit we descended into a small valley and stopped for dinner by a clear brook. Then across another mountain ridge, descended into the valley of a large creek, where we found several camps of emigrants, detained by mountain fever. On a ridge near the road we noticed several newly made graves; and thus, on mountain or plain, death seems always near, fever and cholera being the messengers of his will.

This afternoon as we passed among low ridges, for several miles we encountered myriads of large, black crickets; the ground was literally covered with them, and every particle of vegetation had been devoured. At

times they came in clouds, whizzing through the air like a hail storm. Toward sunset we escaped them by turning into the low bottom of a large creek, where we camped.

This evening Captain Hiram Furry withdrew from our company, or rather, the overwhelming tide of ridicule drove him away. From the night in which his watch was neglected, he found no peace. In vain did he remonstrate, threaten, or try to turn the joke; the odds were against him, and he only gave opportunity for a renewal of the attack. And this afternoon, meeting with an old acquaintance, he gathered up his effects and left us. Such persecution was cruel, though without intentional harm, and I am sure we all wished him a prosperous journey to the mines, and great success.

Wednesday, July 31. Near our camp we found great quantities of large, yellow currants, and it was discovered that the creek swarmed with trout. So, at an early hour, the whole company turned out, and soon we had an abundant supply of both fruit and fish. But it was ten in the forenoon when we left camp. Following down the creek a short distance, then turning to the left, we ascended by a ravine to the red, ashy summit of a mountain. So visible appeared the action of heat, and so destitute of all vegetation, it seemed but yesterday to have emerged from the earth's flaming center. Descending the western slope and passing a deep, green swamp,

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at sunset we crossed a sluggish creek and camped, the oxen feeding on a large growth of wild millet.

Thursday, August 1. This forenoon by an inclined plain of eight miles we ascended a mountain where a few wind riven cedars cast their broken shade, and some large snowbanks relieved the monotony of the dull, gray ridge. Several miles north of the road there is a gap in the mountain, its perpendicular sides in places only a few rods apart. A clear brook ripples in the shadow, and emerging from the mountain, loses itself in a deep furrow, which courses away toward the east. I could see no reason why wagons could not pass through this gap and avoid the steep mountain road. Returning from the gap along the mountain summit, and descending by the emigrant road, in about three miles I found the company halted by a small creek for dinner. The upland ridges, across which lay our road this afternoon, were well supplied with grass, the soil good though rocky. About dark we descended into the swag of a creek where we found plenty of grass, wild flax and willows.

Friday, August 2. At sunrise we continued across the ridges, or spurs, now between parallel ranges of timberless mountains and in about eight miles descended into the valley of a large creek, along which we followed about a mile, and bearing up against the mountain side rounded a long spur, and halted among tall sage for dinner.

In the afternoon we followed the course of a long, winding ravine, the almost perpendicular sides dry and verdureless, and at sunset reached the summit between two cone-shaped peaks. The level sunlight left all below in shadow. An anxious glance ahead revealed a small cedar grove, far below the precipitous spur, which bore the mark of our trail. All except one yoke of oxen were unhitched from each wagon, and with men on each side, to prevent a too rapid movement, wagon after wagon thundered down the rocky slope in a vast cloud of dust. At the foot of the mountain the road crossed some low ridges, sparsely timbered with cedar. There was tall grass in the ravines, but no water could be found. Darkness came upon us, and we camped, turning the oxen into a ravine, though they were too thirsty and tired to eat. We were entirely out of water, and had not the slightest knowledge of the country. Whether it was one, or ten, or fifty miles to the next watering place was a fearful secret, and together with the fact that the twilight had revealed a broad, desert plain, with the outline of our road extending into it, indicated a serious time of suffering.

We were too thirsty to sleep, so about three in the morning, when the moon rose, the teams were brought, and we started in search of water. Descending to the plain, and keeping the wagons widely apart to avoid the dust, we made fair progress until the sun arose in a

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cloudless sky, beautiful and bright, but to us almost fatal. Toward noon the heat made our thirst seem intolerable, and the oxen, breathing the hot dust, were ready to give out. Nearing the edge of the plain we saw on the mountain side about three-fourths of a mile left of our road, a green spot, which proved to be a spring of delicious water. It ran but a short distance and sunk into the dry ground. We halted, drank, took dinner, rested, and felt happy. What magic power over man and beast that little spring possessed. In the afternoon we crossed some dusty ridges, and passed down the dry bed of a water course to a small green flat, where two clear brooks united. Here, at sunset, we camped by a large spring. The remains of some wagons which had been left by their owners supplied us with fuel. They had already been partially burned, and it seemed a pity to destroy property thus, to pile the well-made, nicely carved, painted and bolted pieces on the fire; but we chopped out the spokes, placed the hubs on end, and setting the inside oil on fire, had a convenient place to boil our coffee.

Sunday, August 4. As the supply of grass here was insufficient for our teams, before it was fully day breakfast was over and we were away in search of pasture. Crossing some ridges, at the base of a lofty mountain range we passed an emigrant camp and turned into a wide ravine, the road shaded on either side by the

whispering leaves of the quaking aspen. Here we found a trail, as though something had been dragged in the dust along the middle of the road, and occasionally outside the trail were seen the broad footprints of a bear. Following up the ravine about half a mile we found an ox, which the bear had not only killed, but dragged the whole distance. Here, as he attempted to turn with his burden from the road, it became entangled among some small trees, whereupon he tore one of the hams from the body, and carried it away. It was a large ox, and the bear must have possessed wonderful strength. The ox belonged to the company we had just passed, and some of the men coming up, resolved to give chase and if possible capture the bear. I joined them, but when we reached the rocky upland, Bruin carried his burden too high to be trailed, and his soft feet left no trace upon the rocks, so we lost his track, and returned to the road.

Toward noon we found a small quantity of good grass around a spring in a wooded gulch, and stopped for dinner. In about three miles our chasm-like ravine led us to the summit of the mountain. Around us lay a few dissolving snowbanks; below yawned innumerable ravines and chasms, while far in the wavy distance, over a sea of cones and pinnacles, toward the west, a huge mountain raised its snowy dome into the sky. This I recognized as Pilot Peak, at the head of Raft River, which had been described to me by the mountaineer Baker. Where the

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road begins the descent, a large, pine-shaded spring flows from beneath a rock. Following down a ravine, similar to the one by which we ascended, passing several large aspen groves, as the sunlight faded from the upper cliffs we camped in a grove by a large spring, and the guard took the oxen into a glen just above the camp, where there was an abundance of grass. This morning's experience taught us, while among the mountains, to guard against bears, and keep the herd well together.

Monday, August 5. Following down the brook which flowed from our camping glen, crossing two clear rills, and turning beneath the springy spur of the mountain, we emerged into a broad, green valley. Here we stopped for dinner, and spent some time in fishing for trout, with which these mountain streams abound. This creek we take to be a tributary of Raft River,³⁴ which by way of Lewis Fork, flows into the Columbia. Following down the valley several miles, we crossed the creek and ascended a gentle slope, the summit of which overlooked a descending plain, bearing only a small growth of sage. A long line of willows through the center of this plain, marked the outline of a stream and showed us our next camping place.

Our road was good and we traveled fast, but the sun set, and the willows, without seeming much nearer, faded in the twilight. Night came on, and our road

³⁴Probably east branch of Raft River.

seemed interminable. At last the rush of waters gladdened our ears, and we halted under an archway of willows.³⁵ The guard took charge of the oxen, and after a cold lunch we rolled our blankets about us, and slept on the ground. On these highlands we are often deceived in estimating distance. From where we first saw these willows, we guessed the distance at five miles, but found it to be thirteen.

Tuesday, August 6. According to our ideas of geography, this large creek is another branch of Raft River. Its narrow strip of arable land being overgrown with willows, afforded but little grass, therefore, in search of pasture, at sunrise we forded the creek, and turning northward, struck across the plain for another line of willows; the two uniting several miles below, seemed to enter a deep gorge of the mountain. But scarcely had we left the green turf when the thin crust of the plain gave way, and a wagon and two yoke of oxen came near being buried in the soft, mortar-like substance which underlies the sun-dried surface of the plain. With great difficulty, and considerable noise, they were hauled out, and we continued our journey across the level, white crust which bent and trembled at every step, threatening to engulf us in the alkaline slime. In about half a mile we reached hard gravel, and were relieved from the fear of sinking.

³⁵ Rapid Creek.

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This bed of ash colored slime is about half a mile wide, and extends several miles along the valley. It is covered with a crust but a few inches in thickness, and by tying willow poles together we were able to reach down some twenty feet from the surface without finding bottom. Six miles over a hard, gravel road, brought us to the next branch of Raft River, where, finding plenty of grass and wild barley, we unyoked the oxen and spent the afternoon in fishing for trout. We have now completed the journey of Hedpath's [Hudspeth's] Cut-Off, and this evening the camp fires that glimmer far down the valley of Raft River, show the line of the old Fort Hall road, which follows up the west side, scarcely a mile from our camp.

Wednesday, August 7. Crossing the river this morning we intersected the road by Fort Hall to California, which, following up Raft River, makes a sweeping bend to the south. Near the junction stands a small mound on which is a sulphur spring with a temperature a little above blood heat. From this spring we turned up the valley, which, though two miles or more in width, seems only a defile, so far do the mountains on either side tower into the sky.

On our left the mountain rises smooth and verdureless, its summit crowned with a perpendicular wall of black cliffs, which terminate, where the range falls off in the forks of the river, by a fortress-like rock. On the

right, in wild magnificence, circling around the head of the stream, rises a snow-capped range, the heights at times lost in clouds; while lower down, the fir and pine wave their dark fringes against the crags, and sigh in whispered cadence with the waterfalls. Mountain rills flashed across our road in continual succession, uniting in the valley to mirror the flowers nourished by their constant flow.

Following the trail through the wavy grass, in the afternoon we re-crossed the stream, and by a long slope ascended the ridge, which, curving around the head of the valley, connects the mountains on either side. While ascending this slope, clouds came rolling down from the north until the sun was eclipsed, and the earth lay in shadow. There were a few heavy peals of thunder in the zenith, and for about two hours, rain and hail poured down in torrents. Then, on a strong wind, the storm swept over the southern hills and the scene brightened in the rays of the setting sun. We camped near the summit of the ridge, by a small spring, and though the night was chilly, a cedar grove supplied our camp fires, and the evening passed with comfort and good cheer.

CHAPTER XI

The Heavy Road to Humboldt River

THURSDAY, August 8. At sunrise, as the train moved from the camp, Thomas Hunt and I set out to ascend Pilot Peak, the highest in the range at the head of Raft River, and which had been visible several days. The slope from our camp to the foot hills was gradual, bearing grass and many beautiful flowering shrubs. Passing a defile between immense granite rocks, we seemed to enter the heart of the mountain. In the damp, wild gulches, fountains sung and sprayed the pale, tearful flowers which never saw the sun. Through a ravine we worked our way above pine and fir, where cliff towered upon cliff; at times, as we crept around a projecting point, we seemed suspended in mid-air, and from the dizzy height hardly dared look into the awful abyss below.

Reaching the snow, we cut footsteps in the steep, icy mass with our hunting knives, and thus ascended the highest point. The wild grandeur of the interior now unfolded to our vision. An array of silver-like peaks, possibly the Wind River Chain and from these, bending

around the northern base of our range, and bearing away until lost among the rough hills of the northwest, was the valley of the Snake, or Lewis fork of the Columbia. The snowy Humboldt Mountains lay off in the distant west; and far over an ocean of snow-medallioned ridges, toward the southeast, the Great Salt Lake spread out in the distance. The emigrant roads, with their numerous, slow-moving trains, were plainly visible. The trail from Fort Hall, up Raft River; that across the mountains of Hedpath's [Hudspeth's] Cut-Off, and the northern route from Salt Lake, all converge toward this mountain, and unite a few miles to the westward. Just how wide the expanse overlooked would be difficult to guess, but this bright dome, for a great distance, has been a guide to the Indian hunter and homeless mountaineer, as well as to the weary though hopeful emigrant.

At the western base of the mountain we caught a glimpse of what at first appeared to be a city of ruins. There were the walls, domes, monuments, spires, palaces and roofs, all of dazzling white. While planning a descent into this valley, we were attracted by a mass of clouds moving up Raft River; and soon, on that side, the entire valley was filled up to the snow line, and the clouds presented a level surface like water. The highest chain resembled a shore, and some of the peaks appeared as islands in a lake. After a while the clouds seemed to break and rise and, carried by a strong wind, swept over

THE HEAVY ROAD TO HUMBOLDT RIVER

the two cone-like peaks of the mountain, in a blinding flurry of snow. It only lasted about fifteen minutes, when the sun shone out, the air was clear, but decidedly colder. I afterward learned that a heavy thunder shower had fallen that afternoon in the valley of Raft River. We were surprised to find on the very summit, growing on the point of a rock, which appeared above the snow, a small shrub bearing beautiful yellow blossoms.

Our descent on the west side was very difficult, the gorge being almost perpendicular. Near the base was an escarpment of reddish sandstone, of great height, through which the mountain torrent had cut its way, thus affording us exit to the valley. Wading the cold stream, and passing around an overhanging cliff, we descended to the valley. Here were pyramids of white granite that would rival the world renowned wonders of the Nile; rocks in the form of castles with domes and turrets, spires rising probably five hundred feet, and nicely balanced on the point of some of them large pieces of granite. Altogether the picturesque grouping, the wild mountain background, the clear, cold streams and flower-decked meadows, presented a scene over which one would delight to linger, and yet find it difficult to describe.

These granite blocks extend about two miles down the valley, beyond which the plain, smooth and green, is bordered at the base of the mountains with a fringe of

trees, and marked through the center by a stream, which wanders to the chasm-like gap below; for nature, as if to fence out the profane intruder has thrown around this valley a wall of mountains.

The sun was nearing the horizon, so we could spend but little time in surveying nature's handiwork. Reluctantly turning from the place, and crossing the western mountain, we struck the emigrant road, where it led through a deep cañon, and soon after passed the Pyramid Circle; rows of granite spires and pyramids similar to, but not so interesting as, those at the foot of Pilot Peak. By the overhanging side of one of these, in the deepening twilight, we took shelter from a violent shower. About one mile from the last of these spires we came to the junction of the Northern Salt Lake Road to California.³⁶ By this time it was quite dark, and we had some trouble in keeping the road, as there were many trails made by the emigrants in turning off, on either side, to camp. As we rounded the point of a cedar grove we followed one of these trails, which, fortunately, led us to our own camp. After twenty miles travel our company had found a good spring, and an abundance of grass and sage, and Mr. Hunt and I were well prepared for rest.

³⁶ The description of the Pyramid Circle by Dalton makes it clearly an extinct volcano. The road, in 1852, ran across it entering by one narrow break in the rim and emerging by another. It was not strictly a circle but an ellipse, five miles in one direction, three in the other.

THE HEAVY ROAD TO HUMBOLDT RIVER

Friday, August 9. A bright morning; the air, purified by last evening's shower, and owing to the proximity of snow, was quite cold. Mr. Abraham Hughes left our camp two hours in advance of Mr. Hunt and me yesterday morning to climb Pilot Peak. Once we obtained a glimpse of him part way up the mountain, but he soon disappeared among the rocks, and not finding him at the top, and seeing no evidence that he had climbed the snow, gave us a feeling of anxiety which was greatly increased when we reached camp and found he had not returned.

Supposing he might have missed the camp, and would be able to find us on the main trail, by sunrise we were on the well-worn road which led down the valley toward a steep mountain ridge, on which lay great masses of snow. At the foot of this ridge, turning to the right over a low spur, where several springs gushed from the bank but soon disappeared in the dry ground, and passing some granite rocks which stood like watch towers over the abrupt termination of the ridge, we beheld, far below, a chaotic mass like the remains of a wrecked world.

The wheels were locked, and the wagons slid tremulously down the gravelly steep to the first bench, or table land, where we halted by a little brook, under a shady fringe of birch. Passing thus down several banks, our road circled around the overhanging verge of a stupendous amphitheater, descending by a column-like

spur on the opposite side. Lowering the oxen and wagons down this slippery steep was a hazardous operation. The wheels were chained, the wagons steadied with long ropes held by the men and thus prevented from sliding against the teams, which were scarcely able to retain a foothold on the rocks.

Turning through an ample gateway, where, on either side, stood rocks like open jaws, we found a clear brook, and halted to let the teams rest and feed on its grassy banks. After dinner I went back to examine the wonderful scenery through which we had passed. In the afternoon we crossed a high, red-colored ridge, and descending by a rocky ravine, camped in the valley of Goose Creek. Mr. Hughes failed to find us. All day we traveled slowly, expecting him to overtake us, but another night has come and we feel an anxious suspense on his behalf, and hardly know where to begin our search. He may be crushed under some crumbling cliff, captured by some savage band, or lost in the mountains.

Saturday, August 10. We had planned to remain and institute a search for our missing comrade, Mr. Hughes, but early this morning, greatly to our relief, he walked into camp. He had failed to reach the summit of the peak, and we, strangely enough, had missed him on the way. In returning he was in advance of us, but was not so fortunate in finding the camp. Turning back early the next morning he repassed our train before it reached the

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main trail, and traveled almost to where he had left it the morning before. Then returning, he explored every bypath and camp until, almost exhausted with fatigue and hunger, he found us.

As we broke camp we were joined by six men from Ohio. They had two wagons, with very good teams, and wished to travel with us to California. Following up Goose Creek in order to avoid sloughs and marshes,³⁷ our road kept close to the bluffs on our left. In about ten miles we found, near the center of the valley, two sulphur springs of nearly boiling temperature.³⁸ Two miles above these, where a rocky bluff slopes down toward the creek, we made our camp.

Sunday, August 11. About midnight the camp was surprised by the unexpected entrance of a large bear. He came down the bluff, and while trying to open a box of provisions, was discovered by the guard, who raised the alarm, and fired at him with a pistol. Instantly a dozen of us were out, rifle in hand, and he ran out of camp amid a shower of bullets, and under cover of the night made his escape. As he was within easy range, each one who fired was able to tell just where he hit the bear. No one doubted but that he was dead, and with the dawn we went out to bring him in; but strange to tell, we could not find even a blood stain on the rocks

³⁷ Where were great numbers of wild geese, say other travelers.

³⁸ The Boiling Springs.

over which he took his flight. Of course we all acknowledged that, in our haste, we had missed him—just a little.

The Sabbath sun looked down through a misty veil, the sky seemed to blush at the desecration of God's holy day, and we fain would have remained in camp, but mercy to our teams impelled us to seek better pasture. Continuing up the creek, our road accommodating itself to the curves of the southern bluffs, in a few miles we passed beneath a precipice of sand rock the front of which had been moulded by the action of the weather into beautiful columns and arches, and behind these were large oval shaped rooms.

In about five miles farther we turned up the south branch, and entered Goose Creek Cañon, a chasm which some convulsion of nature has sunk to the depth of four hundred feet, shivering the strata of mountain rocks by a zigzag break of four miles, and pressing them several rods apart.³⁹ Crossing the creek several times, and often following in its channel, in four miles we passed around the perpendicular point of a detached rock, from beneath which gushed a clear, cold spring, and emerged among red, undulating ridges. A few stunted cedars, and the dull, gray, almost omnipresent sage, spread over the hills, and wearied the eye with its unvarying appearance. When we reached the highest point of the ridges,

³⁹ The Four Mile Cañon.

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which overlooked a wide extent of barren bluffs, the clouds, which all day had hovered above us, piled their dark folds in the zenith, an explosive roll of thunder shook the hills, and a torrent of rain deluged the ravines. It rained nearly the whole afternoon. Night overtook us, and despairing of finding grass, we camped by a small cluster of cedars.

We have learned, through painful experience, not to venture among barren hills without water for drinking, and consequently when we left the spring at the head of Goose Creek Cañon, we filled our canteens, which was sufficient for culinary purposes, and the oxen supplied themselves at the ravines, but unfortunately, the red earth produced no grass, and the teams, after the toilsome day, were compelled to do without supper. Surely, it would have been a greater mercy to the oxen to have remained in Goose Creek Valley over Sunday, even though the pasturage was short.

Monday, August 12. With the dawn we were under way, and in two miles came to a large spring flowing from a rocky pyramid, and before it sunk into the ashy plain forming a small, grassy marsh. Here we let the oxen feed, but in two hours they had exhausted the grass, and we moved on down the valley, in about five miles passing a large sulphurous spring or pond, over twelve feet in diameter, and ten in depth, transparent, and very cold. After this, had it not been for the sun and

sky above us, we might have fancied ourselves within the fiery dominions of Pluto: the loose, hot ashes were whirled and drifted with such blinding, suffocating effect. Only a few stalks of greasewood and sage, with shriveled leaves, braved the hot blast, which had smothered out all other kinds of vegetation.

About noon, toward the right of the valley, we passed a small mound, on the top of which was a spring of strong alkali. Near this we turned from the valley across some low, ashy ridges, on which several springs of nearly boiling temperature had built their far spreading strata of calcareous tufa. Descending a broad, slightly inclined plain of sulphurous marl, dark and verdureless, we at last reached the channel of a creek, now dry, and in places crusted over with salt. In holes that had been dug in the channel we found some brackish water. Here we camped, and by driving the oxen two or three miles down the creek, found only a scanty supply of grass, and our camp was entirely without fuel.

Tuesday, August 13. This morning three brothers, named McGee, and their partner, Mr. Ambers, came to our camp with the information that night before last, while they were camped in the valley above, the Indians had stolen all their horses except one, which fortunately was tethered close to their wagon. They had trailed the Indians to the mountains, but dared not follow them farther for fear of being ambushed and murdered. They

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offered their remaining horse if we would take their provisions for them as far as the Sink of the Humboldt River. Every team in the company was much reduced, but Messrs. Young & Co., with their usual generosity and kindly feeling, placed their provisions in our wagons, telling them that they might rest satisfied; while the team and provisions lasted, they would find a welcome at our camp.

About noon we resumed our journey up the dry channel, and in four miles passed some green, stagnant ponds, near which was discovered a clear spring, oozing from beneath the bank in the bed of the creek. Expecting to obtain a cooling draught, we gathered around it with our tin cups, but to our utter surprise found it salt as the ocean. To soften our disappointment we tried the ponds, but when we stirred the green scum, the sickening odor warned us, and we turned away in disgust.

Near this we passed the grave of a young man, who but little over a week since, had been drowned in the rushing tide, which then rose through the now sun-dried channel. His grave is in the ashy plain, unshaded by tree or willow. The board which bears the name "Ralph Holman, Aged 19 years, Drowned Aug. 2nd, 1850," will soon decay. Traveler or friend may unconsciously tread upon his grave; but there the tears of affection will never fall.

In this region the storms seem to be local. Heavy rains on the highlands fill and overflow the gullies for a

few hours, while plains, only a few miles distant, evidently have had no moisture for months.

Following up near the channel, in several miles we circled around a broad marsh or bog, enclosed with low, ashy hills, corresponding in their cheerless aspect to the plain we had just passed. Finding a large, cold spring, we rested a short time while the oxen cropped the grass which grew in tufts on the boggy ground. From this marsh, we followed up a channel in which rippled a small brook, and at sunset camped on its bank. The water, though clear, was warm and sulphurous. An oasis in the ashy plain furnished a scanty supply of grass for our teams.

Wednesday, August 14. Half a mile above our camp we found several large, hot springs, the steam having a strong sulphurous odor, while within a few rods one clear and cold welled up from the ashy plain. A mile and a half farther we passed another large, cold spring, and struck across a wide valley surrounded with high, craggy mountains, many of their summits flaked with glittering snowbanks. Fields of green, nourished by springs, appeared on the plain; but our road lay over the hard, desert marl, through which coursed the brook without waking scarcely a trace of vegetation, not even thorns and briars. About noon we reached the upper extremity of the valley, and stopped for dinner by a spring, the source of the creek we had been following.

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How strangely climates, scenes and seasons are blended here. Yonder, only a few miles distant, is a plain, which under the noonday sun, with its hot sand and noisome vapors, might be mistaken for a slice from the veritable Sahara. Just across an ashy ridge lies a valley in all the beauty and fragrance of summer; here the snowbanks remind us of early spring; and the nearby mountain summits, barren and belted with snow, bring winter in full view.

By a series of crooked ravines we crossed a mountain ridge, and, turning to the right, left the old trail, and descending into a broad, green valley, camped by a spring. This evening there was a funeral in a company which had preceded us into the valley. The mortal remains of James Malcom, an old man, doubtless the victim of cruel treatment and neglect, were laid in the grave.

His sad story seemed to be this: Yesterday, while coming up the valley, through which we traveled this forenoon, exhausted with sickness and fatigue, he was denied the privilege of riding in the wagon. He soon fell in the rear, and the train passed on, his companions taking no further notice of him. Slowly and painfully he struggled on, not believing that he really had been deserted, until he reached the summit of the mountain ridge and saw the three wagons, which composed his train, disappear below the distant slopes toward the

Humboldt River. Hoping to quench his thirst he descended toward this valley, where a bunch of tall willows indicated a spring; but while he was yet a mile distant, and away from the road, his overtaxed nerves gave way and he sank upon the ground in a bed of sage. This was late yesterday afternoon and he was not discovered until about ten this morning, when he was found by a company from Missouri, who carried him to the spring, immediately camped, and made every effort to restore him. For awhile they seemed successful; he revived and told them his story, but his strength gave out, and he died about four this afternoon.

But little was learned concerning him. He was from Ohio, as were also some of his companions. Having been neighbors, he had reposed in them the confidence of familiar friendship; had no interest in their outfit, but, having paid for his passage in advance, would no longer be a source of profit. So they were willing to leave him, hoping perhaps that others might care for him. It was the old story of "Man's inhumanity to man."

Thursday, August 15. This morning we were at a loss to know which trail to follow. That from which we turned last evening was a deeply marked, well-worn road, while the trail down the valley was new, and might have been made by emigrants coming down merely to camp. Reluctant to ascend the steep ridge to the main road, and believing that these springs must find an out-

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let into the valley of the Humboldt, we resolved to follow them. As we neared the lower extremity and passed the mountain spurs which closed the valley, our way seemed completely blocked, and it looked as though we would have to return after all. But, following the brook, we entered a deep, dark cañon. On either side the walls rose several hundred feet, and towering above them, in solemn majesty, the mountains reared their snow fields into the sky. The distance through this cañon was about three and a half miles and much of the way the road, following the bed of the stream, was very rocky and uneven. A mile and a half from the entrance, a torrent of clear, hot sulphurous water, flowing from beneath the south wall, warmed the creek for a considerable distance. At the mouth of the cañon we found several hot springs flowing from the mountain side just above our road, which followed the verge of a cliff. Here a bed of alluvium, saturated with hot water, nearly scalded the oxen's feet and legs as they waded through. Along the creek lay a broad strip of low meadow, on which the grass waved in undisturbed beauty. On each side, rising by a steep bank, were barren plains, bounded by curving mountains, which appeared to unite far below. Turning the teams into the rich meadow, we halted for dinner.

As we pursued the dimly outlined trail, a tempest from the mountains brought upon us a violent hail-

storm. Unhitching the teams, we took shelter under the wagons from the hail, which cut through some of the wagon covers, and pelted the oxen until their backs were covered with large lumps. After the storm we traveled several miles, and at sunset turned into the lowland, intending to camp by the creek, but it had gone; like so many fair promises the water had disappeared, leaving only the dry channel. After considerable search we found a small slough fed by a hot spring, and here put up the tents, some going over a mile to bring sage, our only fuel. Besides a variety of grass, we find here an abundance of wild clover, now in bloom, whose fragrance is a sweet reminder of home.

Friday, August 16. Traveling down the valley through tall clover and grass, and bending slightly around a spur of the mountain, we struck into the old road where it crosses the first branch of the Humboldt River. Following down the north side where sage, willows and grass grew tall, late in the afternoon we crossed a large creek and, at dark, camped in a bend of the river. We had delightful moonlight, with scenery beautiful beyond description. As the teams fed around the camp, the guard was relieved from loneliness, while nearly all the company were engaged in fishing for salmon. All day we observed a blue column of smoke arising from a mountain on the south side of the river, and a fire now glimmers down through the night. Those who claim to understand

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Indian methods, say it is a signal for the Indians to assemble and regard it as a bad omen. Their strange absence, not one having been seen near the road for a long distance, would also indicate unfriendly feeling.

CHAPTER XII

Arrows and Bullets: A Battle with Indians

SATURDAY, August 17. Today we traveled about twenty-five miles, in the forenoon following near the river through tall grass and willows, and in the afternoon across three low sand ridges, striking the river only at intervals. As twilight deepened we crossed a low, ashy flat, and camped on the north bank of the river. As there was no grass near the stream, the oxen were retained at camp until after supper, when John Callaman and I took our rifles, and crossing with the teams to the south bank, drove them about a mile to some sloughs at the foot of the bluffs, where there was plenty of grass, and remained to guard them during the night.

Another herd of cattle fed among the willows, and in walking our rounds we met their guard, a young man from Missouri named Edward Davis. We kindled a fire, and whiled away the hours with our intelligent and social acquaintance. At last he left our smouldering fire and disappeared within the shadow of the moonlit hills in search of his charge. It was after midnight; the moon was nearly hidden behind the range; we had gathered

our oxen, and they had lain down. Silence prevailed, as half asleep we nodded by our blinking fire.

Suddenly the sharp report of a rifle rang out on the morning air. Davis uttered a cry, and all was again silent as the grave. Claspings our rifles we crept into the tall grass. Soon came the trampling of hoofs in the shadow of the bluffs; and next we heard the report of firearms at a camp on the opposite side of the river, about a mile from ours. Convinced that the Indians had made an attack, we lay quietly in our hiding place, and our oxen, undisturbed, still lay where we had gathered them. But the firing ceased, all was again still, and we anxiously awaited the morning.

While it was yet dark we aroused the oxen; they began to feed, and at sunrise were driven to the camp. Here we learned that Davis had been shot and about one-third of the cattle in his charge had been driven away by the Indians. At the same time they had attempted to steal some horses near the camp, but being discovered and fired on they fled. Soon after daylight, Davis' body was found, brought to his camp, and prepared for burial. The Indian murderer must have been very near, for the wound in his (Davis') breast was blackened with the powder. He was not scalped nor mutilated, simply stripped, and his clothing and rifle carried away.

Immediately a company of twenty-five, of whom I was one, volunteered to pursue the Indians and, if

possible, recover the teams. After breakfast we hurried away; the trail had already been discovered, and we followed it as rapidly as possible. Our leader was very hopeful, said there could not have been a large band, or they would have taken all the cattle on that side of the river and it was quite evident that none were mounted; and as the cattle could not travel very fast, he felt confident we could soon overtake them.

After crossing the first mountain range and descending among barren hills, with an occasional spot of moist earth, dwarf willows, and small aspen groves, we entered a long ravine, and soon caught sight of a smoke rising from behind a spur which rounded into our ravine. Our leader, cautiously ascending the spur on our right, saw that the smoke arose from an aspen grove, in a kind of pocket among the hills.

The men were formed in three lines, or groups of eight each, with the understanding that whatever happened we must keep together. We were to move in perfect silence until the leader gave the order, when each was to repeat it and obey. The footprints of the cattle were visible to the lower point of the spur; but whether they had gone down the ravine, or turned toward the camp, we could not determine. And whether we were to surprise the Indian camp, or be ourselves surprised, was equally uncertain. Advancing cautiously, when within about fifty yards, our leader, in a firm voice, gave the

order, "Charge!" which was repeated by all as we dashed furiously into the camp.

Not a shot was fired. We met with no resistance, but our presence seemed to fill the Indians with utter dismay. The children screamed and clung to their mothers, who stood trembling in mute despair. As we halted in the center of the camp, some old men, who looked as though the storms of a century had beaten upon them, came forward, and extending their withered hands, murmured "How?"

All had fled except the old men, women and children, in all about fifty, and these seemed to expect immediate death. But, of course, we could not think of laying hands on these helpless and innocent beings. They were in a more wretched and destitute condition than any I had hitherto seen. Some of the children were entirely without clothing; the wigwams were so woven together with bushes as to keep out the sun, but they could afford little shelter from storms.

Aware that we were liable to an attack at any moment, guards were posted on the heights around to give warning of the approach of Indians, while an effort was made, with the assistance of the old men and squaws, to locate the stolen oxen. They seemed to understand what was wanted, and agreed in pointing to a valley in the next mountain range. So the guards were called in, and the pursuit hastily resumed.

After leaving the Indian camp we again found the trail and followed it out of the ravine, and across a valley to the base of a high mountain, and entered the valley that had been pointed out to us, but it soon branched into several dry, rocky cañons, and here we lost the trail. No trace could be found. Some of the men climbed the highest points around, but failed to see or hear anything of Indians or oxen. Evidently they were in some of these defiles, but it was considered extremely hazardous to enter any of them, for if attacked, every one of us might be killed, without even a chance for self defense, and the pursuit was therefore abandoned.⁴⁰

It was after dark when we reached the valley of the river; crossing and following down some twelve miles, about midnight we found my company, the Missourians being camped nearly a mile below. The night was chilly, and the camp fires smouldered, but I was too tired and sleepy to replenish one, or even get my supper; so creeping quietly into the tent, I was soon lost in sleep.

Monday, August 19. This morning the air was cold, and a white frost sparkled on the grass. At an early hour, with several of the company, I went down the river nearly half a mile to visit a hot spring, which was indicated by a dense cloud of steam. The spring was on

⁴⁰ So far as the editor is aware, this author is the unique authority for the incident above narrated, and also those which follow, including the pitched battle of August 23.

the opposite side, and to reach it we must swim the river, and the cold made us hesitate. Finally John Donnelly and I, thinking the springs would warm the water, went a little below them, threw off our clothes and plunged in. The chill of the stream made our teeth chatter, but when a little more than half way across we struck a hot current, which almost took our breath away, and a few pulls farther the water seemed colder than ever.

Thus, alternately, through cold and hot currents, which did not seem to intermingle in the least, we reached the bank, where we found several large basins of boiling water. The largest was about ten feet in depth, and eight in diameter. Around them was a hot crust, about four inches thick, and underneath, a bed of soft, whitish slime. The water was transparent, and the stream had a strong sulphurous smell. A ledge of hard, porous rock lay a few rods from the bank, and circling around the springs, terminated at the river above and below. Having no desire to try another hot bath we recrossed above the springs but by this time, the air was decidedly warmer.

A little over eight miles from camp the road forked; the right hand one was said to pass over a succession of sand ridges, but obviates fording the river. We took the left hand, and in about a mile crossed the river at an easy ford, and intersected the southern road from Salt

Lake. In two and a half miles we forded the river again, and entered a deep, gloomy cañon. In this we forded the river twice, and emerged on a dusty plain. Near sunset we crossed a low gravel ridge, and descending, camped by the river, making a day's journey of twenty miles.

Tuesday, August 20. This morning we crossed two small creeks, and following down the river on an ashy plain, about noon found some grass, and halted for dinner. Near this we discovered a number of hot springs in the river bank, some of them under water. While here a man named Naylor rode into our camp, his horse, clothes, and person bearing the marks of arrows. He said that he believed himself the sole survivor of a party of six who, early this morning, had taken a trail which they supposed was a "cut-off," or near way from the Salt Lake road. They were all mounted, and while passing through a cañon at a spring were met by a party of six mounted Indians. The whites were unarmed, with the exception of a double-barreled shot gun and a horseman's pistol, which Naylor carried concealed in a sack at his saddle bow.

The Indians were quick to observe the unarmed condition of the whites, and professing friendship, offered a mule for the gun. The owner delivered the gun, which was loaded with buckshot, and taking the mule's bridle, stooped down to drink. Three were filling their canteens, and Naylor, and a man named Weaver, had mounted

and were on their way. There was no suspicion of danger. Suddenly, two of the whites were shot with the gun in the hands of the Indian, the other two at the spring were probably killed with hatchets and, discharging a shower of arrows at Naylor and Weaver, the Indians gave chase. Weaver was struck in the back by an arrow, and his horse, possibly wounded, stumbled over the rocks and fell, and the last Naylor saw of Weaver, he was running for a cliff. Naylor fired his pistol at his pursuers which seemed to hold them in check, and though the arrows hissed about him, neither he nor his horse was seriously hurt. Thus he reached the road, and the Indians dared not pursue him farther.

Our camp was at once established for the night, and leaving a sufficient number to guard the wagons and teams, and being joined by several from another train, a well-armed company of twenty started for the relief of Weaver, and to bury his dead companions. Crossing a high ridge, and following down a steep ravine to the spring, there lay the bodies of the four men, stripped of their clothing, scalped and mutilated. While some attended to their burial, the rest made a thorough search for Weaver. The glens, cliffs, and caves were explored, his name was called again and again, but echo only answered back, and no trace of him or his horse could be found. It was evident that he had been captured, and for us, on foot, to pursue mounted Indians on their own

ground seemed useless, and we therefore, sadly and reluctantly, turned toward camp. One of the exceedingly melancholy features of the tragedy, was the fact that Weaver's young wife was with the train awaiting his return. When we reached the road, Naylor turned back to find his train, and about sunset we reached our camp.

As our teams were rested, it was thought best to make a night's journey, hoping thus to avoid not only the noonday heat, but the suffocating dust. Leaving the valley we struck across the bluffs to avoid a cañon, and bend in the river. Passing a small spring south of the road, and ascending a high ridge, on the west side of which were several large, cold springs, and descending by a rough, narrow cañon, where the slanting moonbeams silvered the rocks above our road, we crossed some low, ashy ridges, reaching the river at three in the morning, and stopped to await the approach of day.

Wednesday, August 21. At daybreak we forded the river, traveled three miles down its southern bank, and camped in a luxuriant meadow, among tall willows.

This forenoon two men were found lying dead. One was in a grassy opening, where he had been killed, stripped and scalped. The other, after being shot with arrows, had evidently hidden from his pursuers, and they had failed to find him. Three arrows had lodged their barbed points in his left side, one a little below his

heart. He had broken off their shafts, but his blood had sprinkled the grass for several rods where he made a trail crawling toward a slough, but had died without reaching it. He was lying on his face, his right hand holding a small tin cup, and within two yards of the water. Who can imagine his agony, or heartache, to die thus alone under the willows, conscious that no dear one might ever know his fate. We found nothing about him by which to ascertain his name or residence, and the features of both were too much decayed to admit of a description. They were buried in shallow graves, the earth heaped above them, and a stake bearing the single word, "Unknown," placed at the head of each.

In the afternoon we moved our camp about five miles down the Humboldt. We now experience some of the difficulties and dangers scarcely dreamed of in the early part of our journey. A virulent diarrhea prevails among the emigrants. Several of our company are quite sick, some of whom require constant care, making double work for those who attend the camp. The teams must have food as well as rest, and it is no small task to explore in advance for pasture. They must also be guarded with the utmost vigilance against the Indians who, though seldom seen, are constantly prowling around us. And those who are able to attend to this duty are almost entirely deprived of sleep. Our provisions too are nearly exhausted, each one having his daily ration, which is

hardly sufficient to sustain life, much less to satisfy hunger. The result is that the laughter, wit and song, which formerly cheered the camp, has given way to an unsocial, morose, and sometimes fault-finding spirit.

Thursday, August 22. Our train left camp at an early hour, and R. McCord and I went to the river, hoping to obtain fish, and thus add to our scanty supply of provisions. The hills near the road are destitute of vegetation and, of course, without game; nor is there any along the river. For some time we have given up hunting there, and to go out of the valley, owing to the hostility of the Indians, would be exceedingly perilous.

During the greater part of the forenoon we waded sloughs, or, tortured by mosquitoes, sat under the shady willows by the stream in nervous expectation, but could not obtain even a nibble. We found a frog and baited our hooks with its flesh, but it was no use, the river seemed utterly destitute of fish. The water was somewhat tintured with alkali, but it was hard to realize that the same stream, in which a few days ago we found such choice salmon, had been abandoned by everything but reptiles.

Disappointed, weary and wet, we started to overtake our train. The road lay through a broad, ashy plain. The dust, mingled with saleratus, sometimes arose in clouds. The hills presented a burned appearance; no vegetation in sight, except a forest-like line of willows along the

river, which at times curved away several miles from the road.

The heat was intense, and we suffered greatly with thirst. Our train not being in sight, at a place where the road approached within a mile of the river, we resolved to go and get a drink. Passing among the willows we struck a wide slough. The water was too stagnant to drink, the tall rushes prevented our swimming across where the water was deep enough, while the mud in the shallow places was too deep to wade, and filled with loathsome reptiles. At last, finding a place where the water was deep, and but few rushes, we each prepared a little raft of dry willows on which we laid our arms, accouterments and clothing, and pushing them on the green surface, swam across. But we were greatly annoyed by a large moccasin snake that plunged in between us, just before we reached the bank. His head nodded above the ripples as he pointed his forked tongue at each of us alternately, while his eyes blazed with a malicious twinkle. Soon his head disappeared, and shuddering at the prospect of feeling his envenomed fangs, we hurried out, and dripping with the nauseous slime, pressed through the willows, and soon discovered an even more irksome task, the crossing of another slough, in which there was little water, but we sunk almost to our shoulders in mire. This accomplished, we soon reached the river, and immediately plunged in to wash away the

accumulated mud and slime. It was a tiresome effort to obtain water, and though it was not very good, still, the first draught seemed an ample compensation.

If any have doubts, let such traverse these plains at noonday on foot, and breathe the hot mixture of saleratus and dust, and they will admit that almost any price is not too much for a drink of cold water.

Determined not to cross the sloughs again if possible to avoid it, we followed down the river on a small trail. Here we discovered moccasin tracks, which with willow branches cut off and not yet withered, indicated the presence of Indians. And our hearts beat quickly as we thought of the possibility of meeting a fate similar to that of the two men whom we buried yesterday. The path in a few miles led out to the open plain, and as the day was far advanced, we walked as rapidly as possible, hoping to overtake our train before dark.

At sunset we reached a camp of Missourians. The leader, Mr. Riggs, informed us that there were bands of hostile Indians along the river; that yesterday a skirmish had taken place on the north bank, in which one white man and several Indians were killed. Also, that some men belonging to a company from Iowa, camped near, had today been pursued, and that now the two companies had united for mutual defense.

These stories, and the indications we had found along the river, filled us with alarm, but as none in these com-

panies had seen our train, we concluded that it must be in advance, and still hoping to overtake it, we hurried on.

As night gathered around us, walking became more difficult, our progress was slow, and having eaten nothing since morning, we were hungry and faint and regretted leaving Mr. Riggs' camp. But toward midnight we saw a light, indicating a large fire among the willows, and felt certain that it had been lighted by our company as a signal for us. Traveling toward it across the plain and through the willows, at last we came to a slough, into which we dared not venture in the dark. The fire was less than the fourth of a mile distant, and trying to let them know where we were, fired our pistols and halloed with all our might; but we received no answer, and finally concluded it could not be our company.

When the moon arose we continued our journey down the river, through marshes, among sloughs and willows, until suddenly emerging from a large cluster toward a little camp fire, we saw the rifles of five men glimmer in the moonbeams, and a voice in broken English demanded, "Who ish dere?"

We hailed them, and after considerable parley we were permitted to enter the camp. It proved to be a company of Germans from St. Louis; and as they watched us with suspicion, we made our way to another camp only a few rods distant, where we found a small company from Ohio. This afternoon, while at dinner,

they had been attacked by a band of Indians, who captured two of their oxen, and would have taken their wagons had it not been for the timely arrival of the Germans.

We also learned that the camp which we had mistaken for our own, was that of the Indians who, I suppose, had assembled to feast on the oxen they had captured. Just what they thought of our demonstration or serenade, we did not know, but it was surely well for us that we failed to find a path into their camp.

Their presence also accounted for the suspicious manner in which we were received by the Germans. Seeing two persons approaching as from the Indian camp at so late an hour, and their features scarcely visible in the moonlight, was enough to excite suspicion.

It was now near morning and, utterly exhausted with the day's adventure, we lay down by the fire and soon forgot our weariness in sound, refreshing sleep.

Friday, August 23. This morning the company from St. Louis (German) with that from Ohio, being in a good position, remained in camp, hoping to be joined by other companies before taking the road, and exposing themselves to an attack from Indians.

The Missouri and Iowa companies, captains Riggs and Walker, leaving camp with the dawn, arrived early in the forenoon, and it was at once determined, if possible, to drive the Indians from the valley. Sixty men,

including McCord and myself, were mustered for the attack. After electing Walker captain, and Riggs lieutenant, and making various arrangements in regard to the order of the day, the teamsters drove the wagons slowly away, and we marched for the Indian camp.

The plain opposite their encampment was quite level for more than a mile from the river, after which came a succession of barren ridges, gradually increasing in height, until they terminated in a mountain range far toward the south. Near the river the plain was low and wet, producing tall grass and willows, but farther back it was dry and ashy, bearing only dwarf sage.

Our little battalion, in four lines, advanced some distance into the grass, and Riggs, on a mule, the only mounted man among us, rode forward to reconnoiter. Seeing the Indians concealed in the tall grass, and many on horses behind the willows, awaiting the attack, he gave the signal, and we moved forward.

As we approached he said, "Gentlemen, they have crossed the river to fight us; we are in for it; don't lose a bullet, take good aim, and keep together."

Just then the mounted Indians dashed from the thickets in a sweeping circle, and when within about two hundred yards, those on foot, who had been concealed in the grass, sprang up with a terrible yell, and let fly a shower of arrows, which fell a little in front of us.

Riggs, who commanded the two lines on the left, gave

the order "Fire" and seven riderless horses bounded from the circle, to be immediately mounted again.

Walker then gave the order, "Retreat to open ground," and the two lines on the right, becoming confused, some began to run.

Riggs saw it and shouted, "Stand firm, stand firm! Use your rifles, every man!"

The Indians taking advantage of our seeming panic, came with a rush, yelling at the top of their voices, about thirty on horseback and probably one hundred and fifty on foot, armed with bows and arrows, and a few rifles.

With us the case was desperate, and I think each man stood firmly, loading and firing as rapidly as possible. Some of their arrows fell among us without injury, and their bullets, fired at the same range, hissed harmlessly over our heads; but they failed to make us run, disperse, or to overwhelm us in a hand-to-hand struggle. Soon, however, they retreated and tried to keep beyond the range of our rifles.

Moving toward the bluffs, they at last took refuge in a narrow ravine, with the evident intention of bringing us within range of their arrows before we could use our rifles on them. We followed, but instead of entering the ravine, we divided in two lines, one halting part way up, and the other ascending the ridge, giving them an enfilading fire down the ravine. The effect was terrible, but

instead of going south toward the mountains as we hoped they would, they gathered up their wounded, and leaving their dead, returned slowly toward the river. Our reserve line tried to capture some of their horses, which in all probability had been taken from emigrants, for they were not ponies, but of large American breed. In this, however, they failed.

One of our men intent on seizing a horse from which the rider had been shot, received a bullet which lopped the brim of his hat. The place from whence it came was indicated by smoke wreathing above a large sage bush, behind which he saw an Indian hastily loading his gun. Instantly there was another report, and the Indian, who was sitting on the ground, simply lay down. Two Indians made a rush, caught the horse in question, and were away before the man could reload his rifle. Coming up after his gun was loaded, I went with him to see the Indian who lay back of the sage bush. He was lifeless. The ball had entered the left side of his broad breast, and I suppose passed through his heart. He was an old man, fighting on his own soil, and no doubt had laid down his life in what he considered a just and holy cause. As I gazed on his manly form reclining in death, his left hand firmly grasping his rifle, his features still retaining the look of scorn, which he so proudly bent on his white foe, the thought arose that with education, and the Christian virtues, he might have been one of the best

and most useful of men, and I could not restrain a feeling of regret that I had been in any way connected with the tragic events of the day.

Slowly the Indians retreated toward the river, and as they reluctantly passed under the willows, they would occasionally turn, and with frantic gestures, shake their weapons at their pursuers.

Although they out-numbered us three to one, and possessed a courage which deserved a better fate, their arrows availed nothing against our rifles; and even their rifles, such as the Hudson's Bay Company sold, were of little value.⁴¹

At last they took refuge in a bend of the river overgrown with tall willows, surrounded on one side by the river, and on the other by a wide, deep slough, with only a narrow path between. This was the slough that McCord and I found last night when we mistook the Indian camp for our company, and it was fortunate for us that we failed to find the path.

To attack them in this stronghold would have been attended with great sacrifice of life, and was prudently avoided. None of our party had been seriously injured,

⁴¹ In 1846 the emigrants suffered much from the Indians on this section of the trail. See Lienhard, Heinrich. *Californien*, Zurich, 1898, pp. 92 ff. Also the various narratives of the Donner party tragedy. Turnbull in 1852 reports thefts by these Indians, the shooting of individual men with arrows, and the killing of some of the natives by the whites, but Dalton the same year ridicules the idea that these Indians should give trouble.

while a considerable number of the Indians had been killed, and though they had not been driven from the valley, they had received a terrible chastisement.

But we had no time to examine the field; for, as Mr. Riggs suggested, we would better find the trains without delay lest the Indians steal a march on us, and raid them in our absence. So we hurried away, and in about fifteen miles found them camped together. McCord and I, being unable to learn anything of our company, were invited to Mr. Riggs' tent; a kindness we greatly appreciated, as we had been nearly two days without food, which added to the exhausting activities of the day, had so worn us out that we were ready to faint; but although themselves limited to reduced rations, they generously gave us a share.

Mr. Riggs was the acknowledged hero of the day; being mounted gave him a wider view than others, but exposed him to greater danger. It was his coolness, and prompt orders which saved our line from panic, and turned the tide at the right time.

Toward midnight a man with a span of mules dashed into our camp. He was greatly excited, and said he had been pursued by Indians. Traveling alone from California to Salt Lake City, he followed a trail far out on the plain, and consequently failed to come within speaking distance of our trains, or of us; and unconscious of the presence of Indians, or of their hostility, about dark

turned to the river, and camped a little below the late battle ground. He had no wagon; simply rode one mule, and packed his outfit on the other.

His lone watch fire led the Indians to his camp. Hearing something among the willows he became uneasy and suspicious of danger, packed up, caught and saddled his mules, and for a time was undecided whether to go on, or back to the camp he had passed at some distance, during the afternoon. The night was too dark for him to see their approach, and as he concluded to go on, he suddenly found himself confronted with a band of mounted Indians. Turning and whipping his mules into all possible speed he soon met another band, who yelling like a legion of incarnate fiends, tried to stop him, but firing his pistol at them he bounded from their grasp, and hurried back to our camp. In his fright, he was quite uncertain as to when or where his pursuers left him.

CHAPTER XIII

New Horrors of the Desert

SATURDAY, August 24. Awaking from a refreshing sleep, with the early dawn we were on the road in search of our train. Passing with the utmost exertion, through a broad, ashy plain, by noon we had traveled about twenty miles. We were now quite sure that our train was not in advance; and seeing a cloud of dust on the opposite side of the river, concluded that it arose from another road, and so resolved to cross over.

Turning from the ashy plain, and wading some sloughs, we entered among tall willows and struck into a path where we found the freshly made footprints of Indians. These were admonitory; so preparing our weapons for instant use we pressed our way through the willows as fast as possible. The river ran close to the north side of the valley, and the distance across was great, and being impeded by sloughs and tangled weeds we did not reach it until near sunset. But when we swam across, and with the aid of some long willow roots climbed the steep clay bank, we were delighted to find ourselves within half a mile of a well-worn road. Reaching it, we

lay down in the sage to await the arrival of some train by which we might learn something of our own. The presence of a traveled road, after our perilous journey through the valley, haunted by savage enemies, seemed a promise of security, and to us a new lease of life.

Presently a cloud of dust announced the approach of wagons, and ascending a small mound, to our inexpressible joy we beheld our division of the Wisconsin Blues. There were the companions, endeared to us by the cheerfully shared toils and vigils of many weary days and nights; the laboring oxen, as they puffed the dust from their nostrils, and even the wagons with their grimy covers possessed for us a charm never realized before.

Our company crossed the river on the morning in which we left, and since then had traveled on the north side. Hence our inability to find them. They had heard of the Indian troubles on the south side and began to fear that we had fallen victims. Matlock and Kingsbury had gone out hoping to find some information respecting our fate, returning to camp about dark. The day was very warm and the teams suffered much from dust. We camped by the river among luxuriant grass and willows, but at the distance of half a mile northward the valley and hills, as far as the eye can reach, are totally devoid of vegetation.

Sunday, August 25. This morning a dank, chilling vapor hung over the valley. The sun scarcely visible, with-

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held its warmth until toward noon, when the red air became heated like the breath of a furnace. Following near the bank of the river, where the earth was moist, during the forenoon we avoided the dust which rolled in perpetual clouds across the plain; but in the afternoon we traveled among high ridges of soft, hot sand, and at dark camped again beside the river, among tall willows.

Monday, August 26. Finding some good grass on an island near camp, we remained during the forenoon so that the oxen might feed and rest. Traveling in the afternoon about eleven miles among sand ridges we camped by a slough which inclosed a large island. The water being malarious, and with but little grass, and no fuel, our camp was extremely cheerless.

Tuesday, August 27. With the dawn we resumed our weary way across the sand ridges. Opposite to this the river bottom has the appearance of a broad, grassy plain, but really is a deep morass, the rushes rising in wavy luxuriance over its malarious surface. In the afternoon we found the dead body of an Indian lying beside our road. Partially stripped of his clothing, his upturned breast revealed the fatal bullet wound. He might have been dead twenty-four hours, but we failed to learn anything of the circumstances under which he died. Probably he met his fate in an attack on some emigrant train.

At nightfall we descended from the sand bluffs to a small grassy flat by the river, and camped near a large

bunch of willows; and while our coffee and bean soup simmered over the fire, we tried to relieve by cheerful songs the depression which sickness, fatigue and short rations had wrought.

After supper the oxen were driven across the river, and preparing a little raft of dry willows to carry my clothes and rifle, I swam over to guard them during the night. Aware that Indians were probably lurking among the willows, I thought it prudent not to kindle a fire.

Wednesday, August 28. This morning a slight frost was visible on the grass, and the chill air, oppressive with malarial odors, soon after sunrise became so hot as to produce a sense of suffocation. As we traversed the barren plain, sinking deep in the loose sand and ashes, the hot dust filling eyes and lungs, it seemed at times insupportable; and the oxen dragging the heavy wagons made but little progress and almost perished on the road.

At sunset we turned half a mile from the trail and camped in a small willow shaded glen by the river, which has a nauseous, alkaline taste, and not a fish is found in its sluggish tide. Scarcely a blade of grass could be found, and after a toilsome day the oxen tried to feed on the bitter branches of the willows.

Thursday, August 29. Making an early start we traversed a broad plain on which the wind had drifted the sand into heaps. This plain joined the river by a high, perpendicular clay bank, while far northward, through

the dust could be seen the dim outlines of barren hills. The midday heat was terrible, and many oxen and horses lay dead by the road. Wagons had been abandoned, clothing, tents, and the paraphernalia of camp equipage had been thrown away, and were strewn along the trail. It was a terrible day; the panting oxen were inclined to lie down, and it seemed as though we must abandon the wagons. Every nook and corner along the river was explored for grass. About sunset the teamsters were signaled, and descending the steep bank to the river the oxen were driven to an island where, among tall willows, they found considerable grass.

Friday, August 30. Remained at camp to let our teams feed and rest. Being nearly out of provisions we killed one of our cattle, and cutting the meat in thin slices, dried it in the sun, after which it was stowed away in the wagon. By sunset, the grass on our island meadow was exhausted, and being compelled to find other pasture, and hoping by a night journey to avoid the dust and intense heat, we again set forward. Following down the river a short distance, and then striking across a broad, ashy plain, totally devoid of vegetation, the surface in places being very hard and smooth, after fifteen miles, at midnight, we stopped by the river. But as no grass could be found, the oxen were guarded in the road. A few tents were pitched, but most, wrapped in their blankets, slept on the ground.

Saturday, August 31. At daybreak it was discovered that several of our company were missing; but the starving teams required immediate attention, and we drove on in search of grass. In about three miles, descending again to the river, where a meager supply had been found, we stopped and prepared breakfast.

One by one our missing companions came straggling into camp. Tired with their night journey, one after another had laid down to rest, and had fallen asleep, and were only awakened by the rising sun when, surprised at being alone on the wide plain, each one came in search of the train wondering why he had been so carelessly left on the road.

This morning a German staggered into our camp; starved, weak and dejected, he begged for something to eat, saying he had eaten nothing for several days. His eyes were sunken and glassy, and a deathlike pallor overspread his face. We gave him some hot coffee and jerked beef, and after resting awhile in the shade of the wagon, he resumed the journey which was fast wearing away his life; for it seemed hardly possible that he could go much farther.

Each day adds horror to the tide of human misery which rolls down this valley. The teams that died have left the unfortunate owners no alternative but to take their provisions on their shoulders and wade the hot sands through the day, and at night sleep on the ground curtained by malarious fog, until overcome by fatigue

and exposure, death finds them under some sage bush or willow, and ends the journey.

It has been said of the world weary pilgrim, that the woes which afflicted him most were the things that never happened; only dreaded, not real. But surely, suffering here is invested with an awful reality.

At eleven in the forenoon the reluctant teams, hitched to the wagons, took their way across the plain, which produced only a few bunches of greasewood, and was crusted in many places with salt. Toward the north arose a high range of hills, corresponding in their desert-like appearance to the plain, which falls off at the river, or river valley, by a perpendicular clay bank of considerable height. There are many deep gullies, commencing far out on the plain, and with steep banks leading down to the river, and it is only by these that teams and wagons can approach the river. The road, however, must follow beyond the heads of these gullies, for which reason it is generally a long distance from the river.

About sunset we turned down one of these gullies to the river, where some of the company had found, near a stagnant slough, a quantity of bunch grass, the blades of which were gemmed with fine crystals of salt. While guarding the oxen near camp, and replenishing my watch fire with some pieces of a broken wagon,⁴² I threw

⁴² Broken, abandoned wagons were an important fuel resource on this segment of the trail.

in a board bearing the inscription, "Drowned, a Young Man, Unknown."

Sunday, September 1. Our road today, though quite level, lay through a perfect desert, devoid of the usual dwarf sage, and covered with hot cinders and ashes. The sun's heat was intense; and the dust, mingled with sale-ratus, seemed intolerable. At times a hot wind swept across the plain, whirling the dust cloud mid-air, and as in playful mockery of our pain, pouring the hot ashes on our heads, until a person might have been excused if, in the delirium of torture, he had fancied himself in the neighborhood of the rich man's hell.⁴³

About four in the afternoon we descended to the river by a deep gully and let the oxen drink, but as there was no grass we ascended by another gully and continued our desert journey. All who were able, except the teamsters, made a diligent search for grass; every nook and bend of the river was explored. We found a few places where there had been quite a growth, but it had been utterly devoured; and some time after dark, when the teams were ready to give out, we camped on the plain. A painful depression pervaded the company. The guard lit his pipe and sat apart in moody silence to watch the oxen, which had they done their utmost, could hardly

⁴³ The afternoon west wind, blowing from the Sierras, made the dust on the Humboldt Desert an excruciating affliction. Joaquin Miller conveys something of the reality in his poem, *Pilgrims of the Plains*.

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have gotten out of sight before morning. The rest of us, rolled in our blankets, lay down to sleep, but the ashes smarted in our eyes and about all we accomplished was to get ourselves, if possible, more thoroughly enveloped in dust.

Monday, September 2. With the first trace of dawn the teams were yoked, and in slow procession the wagons lumbered across the plain. It was evident that the oxen could endure but little more, as with closed eyes, and the big tears trickling from the swollen lids, they labored through the dust. One lay down, and was replaced with the mate to the one we had slaughtered, and it was with difficulty, that he was kept along with the train, though unyoked.

After traveling about five miles some of our company signaled the train, which turned down a ravine, or gully, to the river. Here, on a small flat, was found a luxuriant growth of grass and willows, which, strangely enough, had been overlooked by the emigrants. When the wagons stopped, our tired-out ox kept straight on for the river, approaching it where the bank was about ten feet high, and being unable to see, he walked to the brink which giving way he soured in. It washed the dust from his eyes, and swimming across, he climbed a low bank into the rich pasture, where he was soon joined by the rest of the herd.

After a bath in the river, which was sufficiently alkaline to furnish its own soap, the tents were pitched, fires

kindled, and soon a breakfast of stewed jerky, bean soup and coffee was served, hot and delicious. An epicure might have turned away in disgust had he seen us seated on the ground, each with a piece of jerked beef on his fork, and a tin cup in his hand used alternately for soup and coffee. But if any would appreciate the pleasure of such a breakfast, let him travel this road for a week on short allowance.

Tuesday, September 3. Our oxen having devoured all the grass we could find, at sunrise we ascended the ravine and again took our way across the plain, its monotony being relieved by a few bunches of greasewood. It was perfectly level, in places having a whitish crust which seemed to have been deposited in a liquid state, then dried and hardened in the sun. Our road made a great northward bend to avoid a large marsh or bog; the turf at the edges having been set on fire, sent up vast columns of smoke.

In the afternoon, nearing the low spur of a mountain, we came to a long, crooked slough, with high clay banks. Here we found several springs of clear water, but all, with one exception, were strongly impregnated with sulphur and alkali. Filling our canteens and water casks at this spring we traveled west about five miles where, finding some saltish grass and a few dwarf willows, we camped on the plain.

Several companies are camped near us, all of whom

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seem to be nearly, or quite destitute of provisions. Many wagons have been left on the road, and with them most of the clothing with which their owners were supplied on leaving home. The teams are too much reduced to carry heavy burdens, consequently the people are compelled to travel on foot; and, of course, those who are so unfortunate as to be sick, are in a most pitiable condition. Without proper medicine, food or clothing; exposed alternately to the intense heat by day and the chill by night, there is little hope for recovery, and many yield to despair, some also being inhumanly deserted.

About midnight a young man named James Preston, from Illinois, died near our camp. With his three companions he began the journey with horses. Some had fallen victims to alkali poisoning, and only a few days since their two remaining horses were stolen by Indians. Leaving their wagon, and carrying what they could in knapsacks, they continued the journey, until two days ago when, after leaving the spring in the slough already mentioned, Mr. Preston was prostrated with diarrhea. His companions ministered to his wants as best they could, returning to the spring for water, fixing up a blanket to shelter him from the sun by day, and at night shielding him with their blankets from the chill.

The thoughts of his own helplessness, and the suffering occasioned his companions by being thus delayed on the desert, was too much for his sensitive nature, and he

urged them to leave him to his fate. But they encouraged him with cheerful words, and when they found there was a doctor in our company, they called him and were all quite hopeful.

I went with Doctor Callaman who, after careful examination, gave his companions to understand that it was doubtful if he could live until morning, and advised them to let him know, as he might want to send some message to his friends. He did not seem surprised at the announcement, but calmly said he was ready to meet his God; gave some special instructions, and then, in a soft, low tone, talked of his father, mother, brothers and sisters, and of his affianced, in words that touched every heart, and caused the tears to flow as we listened in breathless silence. At last, with a special effort, he thanked his companions for their kindness; rested awhile, then whispered, "Good-bye"; and in a few minutes his spirit was gone. His mind did not waver for a moment, and even when utterance failed he gave us a look of recognition.

In the early morning his companions, assisted by others, performed the last sad duty of burial; and soon after the sun arose, the place was deserted by all save the tenant of that lone grave.

Wednesday, September 4. We resolved to reach the river at the nearest possible point for, from the appearance of the country, there was reason to believe that we

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were in the neighborhood of the Sink; and should we travel out on the great desert, without a supply of water, the forty or fifty miles of dry sand between the Sink of the Humboldt and Truckee River would be fatal to our teams.

Therefore, turning, as we supposed, in the direction toward the Humboldt, in about four miles we came to a large slough of brackish water, the main channel of the river being about three-fourths of a mile beyond, and along the edge of an extensive marsh. Between this slough and the river the lowlands produced excellent grass. Following down the slough about three miles we stopped to allow the teams to feed and rest. We are no longer troubled with preparing dinner; our rations are dealt out so sparingly that we seldom eat anything at noon. Indeed we would like to forget the dinner hour, but the more we try, the more we can't.

Near our noonday resting place we found a large number of Pah Ute Indians gathering the seeds of a large plant which grew in great abundance around the marsh. The seeds are ground with a stone rolling pin on a broad stone having the upper surface neatly dressed into a deep curve. The meal is mixed with water and molded into cakes and baked on a bed of coals, made of dry sage roots which the squaws brought in large cone-shaped baskets. These Indians are smaller than any we had yet seen, nor are they so well formed; some are dressed in

buckskin, but many have the cast-away clothing of the emigrants, and the children are nearly or quite naked. Living on vegetables, and especially on roots, they have obtained for themselves the name "Diggers."

In the afternoon we moved about three miles, still keeping near the slough and meadow, which, in its rich green, contrasted strangely with the surrounding desert; like the sweet sanctity of home in a cheerless world.

Almost baffled in our efforts to obtain fuel, we at last brought the dry roots of rushes from a bog half a mile distant. They burned readily, but produced little else than smoke and ashes. However, in the absence of provisions to cook, heating our coffee was the only practical need of fire.

Thursday, September 5. This morning we cut some grass, and when it became dry, about three in the afternoon, loaded it on the wagons, filled our water casks and moved on.

Toward sunset we passed a large Pah Ute encampment. At the door of a lodge lay the dead body of an aged Indian, and around it sat a number of young girls, weeping and making piteous lamentation. Passing on, we met a large company of squaws, carrying on their shoulders cone-shaped baskets filled with roots and stalks of sage, with which, according to their custom, they gave us to understand, they intended to burn the dead body.

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Some time after dark we halted for the night. The oxen found plenty of feed; but being without fuel, no fire cheered our moonless camp. However, as we chewed our scanty supper of dry jerky, some one observed, I suppose by way of consolation, that for hungry men it was far better than bread, because it took so much longer to eat it.

Friday, September 6. We noticed this morning that the Indians were busily engaged in making sugar from wild sugarcane which grew here in abundance. The cane was cut, and laid in the sun to dry, the juice forming a crust on the surface. It was then laid on a mat, the sugar crustation thrashed off, and taken up ready for use. Stripping some of the sugar from the cane, I found it had a very pleasant taste, but the canes were so infested with insects that it was almost impossible to obtain any pure sugar. That which had been collected contained a large proportion of insects, but the Indians gave me to understand that they were sweet, too. However, I had no desire to taste them.

Finding an abundance of good grass we remained to let the oxen feed and rest until eleven in the forenoon; and in two miles came to the west lake of the Sink, along which we traveled about ten miles toward the southwest, and camped on its bank. The water of this lake is shallow and muddy, and judging from roads leading into it, the ground now overflowed is at times dry. The

country around is destitute of vegetation, except a few bunches of dwarf prickly pear, and greasewood. We tied the oxen to the wagons, and gave each a small allowance of hay.

Saturday, September 7. Sunrise found us on the way, and in two miles we came to the narrow slough connecting the lakes with a large marsh, or as it is generally called, the Lower Sink. The water was quite yellow, and tasted of alkali.

Crossing a low ridge and descending on the west side to the marsh, at noon we stopped and pulled some rushes, which the oxen eagerly devoured; and while they refreshed themselves we sat in the shade of the wagons, each with a string of beef, slicing it with our hunting knives, and chewing the leather-like chips by way of dinner. Seasoned with hunger it was truly delicious, and the fact that we dared not eat enough made it taste all the better.

Considering the enfeebled condition of the teams we almost despaired of seeing them safely over the long desert road. And as each moment of delay made our success less certain, we hurried on, over a hard, smooth road near the edge of the marsh, where we reached the last slough, or pond of the Sink, which extended farther than usual and overflowed the Sulphur Wells.

We were now at the desert. The river had run into the ground. All the bright, cool springs which glided so

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gaily from their mountain home had been lost at last in these low, stagnant sloughs. Here they all end; like the glowing hopes and gilded dreams of many who began this journey, but whose bodies now repose in death under the desert's sands, or the creeping moss of the wilderness.

It was just sunset when we stopped on a low sand ridge, took a lunch, and without unyoking the oxen gave them all the slough water they would drink, and again set forward, intending to travel as far as possible before we were overtaken by the scorching sunbeams of another noon.

The whole country seemed to have been swept by the consuming blast of a hot furnace. Chasms of unknown depth traversed the plain in all directions, revealing in many places a deep stratum of bluish clay below the sand, ashes, and cinders of the surface while crustations of salt and saleratus deny the possibility of growth to the storm-driven seeds.

Our road for about ten miles was hard as a pavement and quite level, then it ran among broken ridges, the outlines of which only were visible. Some time after midnight we reached the hot springs.⁴⁴ Having traveled twenty miles since dark, and the teams being very tired, we concluded to rest here until morning. Even in the

⁴⁴So hot that a woman and a small boy, falling into one of them in 1852 were badly scalded, Dalton says.

midst of this desert it was deemed unsafe to trust the camp without guard, and as it was the intention, as much as possible, to relieve the teamsters from guard duty, the few of us who were not teamsters were often on guard two nights in succession; therefore, although I had been on duty last night, it fell to my lot to act as sentinel this night also. As there was danger of the oxen getting to some of the hot springs, they were tied to the wagons; and then my only duty was to keep the wolves at bay, and I was much surprised to find so many of these animals here. They prowled around the camp in large bands, often coming within pistol shot, tempting me, and I would have fired upon them but for disturbing my companions who wrapped in their blankets, lay asleep under the wagons.

With the first traces of dawn I aroused the company, and when various vessels were filled with water to cool, we prepared breakfast; in the meantime giving the oxen nearly all the hay, reserving only a little, with some good water as a noonday feed, for, according to our imperfect ideas, we had yet twenty-five miles of desert road before us.

The country around these springs is uneven, and barren, truly a desert place. The springs are on the side of a low, rocky ridge. That which seems to be the fountain head is a chasm in a ledge from which the boiling water rises at intervals in a column about two feet in diameter

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to the height of fifteen feet, emitting clouds of roaring steam. The boiling will then gradually subside, the column lower until the surface of the spring becomes placid. In a few minutes the puffing of the steam will be heard, and the water rise as before. Just below this, in the rock, is a pond about forty feet in diameter and eight in depth, steaming like a boiling cauldron. Around these are numerous smaller springs, all of boiling temperature, as escape valves for the steam through the calcareous formation which extends for a considerable distance around.

The water, which in a short distance sank into the earth, had a strong, metallic taste, and when cold, the oxen, though very thirsty, would drink but little. We used it in making coffee, but the metallic taste was not disguised, and our breakfast was furnished with better novelty than coffee.

Sunday, September 8. At sunrise we left the hot springs, and bending around the base of a gray hill, our trail followed down a channel that once might have been a watercourse, but was now dry and crusted over with salt. Near this we found a human body. It may have been some one who had fallen, overcome with heat, and who died where he lay. They had not even scooped for him a grave, but as the body lay in a wide furrow, somebody had spread over it a little hay, on which had been heaped some sand, which the wind was fast carrying

away, while buzzing flies were ready to dispute the prize with the worms. An old emigrant who stood by surveying the melancholy spectacle, while pity and anger alternately played over his features, remarked, "If I had such friends as that man had, I wouldn't want to die until I had buried the last one of them *decently*."

Traveling out on a plain, in many places crusted with fine, white salt, and passing many dead oxen, horses, mules, and deserted wagons, we were presented with the mirage of a beautiful lake, bordered in some places by perpendicular rocks, in others by groves of low, shady trees, so well defined that in some instances their image was mirrored in the apparent surface of the lake. At one point, clouds of vapor seemed rising near the lake, which cast deep shadows while floating over its surface, and these we supposed indicated hot springs.

At first we thought we were traveling a new road, and instead of going to Truckee River, were approaching Pyramid Lake, but as we advanced into the plain the lake suddenly disappeared and there opened before us a wide valley, surrounded by low, well-timbered hills. Plainly defined in the center of this valley we could see trains of emigrant wagons, groups of horsemen, and, in short, almost anything the imagination might picture. The mirage continued until near sunset, when the beautiful illusion gradually faded from our view, leaving only the dull, monotonous desert. Though for hours we knew

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it was unreal, yet we so desired the lake shore, the woods, the grassy slopes, and probable cold springs, with all its beautiful revelations, that when the last trace was gone, there came to us a feeling of deep disappointment.

Owing to the intense heat we traveled very slowly, and the stench from the decaying carcasses strewn along our way added nausea to our fatigue.

About sunset we passed among tall bunches of greasewood, around which the wind had piled large heaps of sand, making the place resemble a well-cultivated cornfield. From this, in the deepening twilight, our road lay across ridges of soft sand. Ascending these, some of the oxen gave out and had to be taken from the wagons. This increased the labor of the others, and it was with the utmost difficulty that the wagons were brought to the summit of the last ridge. But no sooner was it accomplished than the oxen, as though conscious of approaching water, renewed their exertions. One ox that had repeatedly lain down, and had been lifted on his feet, while coming up the ridge, puffed the sand from his nostrils, and extending his nose in the air, as if to satisfy himself that his efforts would not be in vain, pushed off with a steady pace for the river, and about two hours after dark, its murmur greeted our ears like the glad welcome of an old friend.

After drinking, the oxen were taken a short distance up the river for grass, but they were too tired to eat, and

almost immediately lay down. Like the oxen, we took a cool drink from the river, and lay down on the sand, too tired to attempt any cooking or pitch a tent.

At the dawn, hoping to find better pasture, we crossed Truckee River, which at the ford was eight rods wide and three feet deep, with a clear, strong current. Driving a short distance up the river, we camped among tall grass, interlaced with vines and flowers, in the shade of large cottonwood and aspen trees.⁴⁵ What a luxury once more to recline beneath the shadow of a tree, and realize that we had crossed the last desert. We wanted to tell the oxen all about it; but they, always ready to improve their opportunities, were busy laying in a supply of grass.

⁴⁵ Truckee Meadows, not far east of the present capital of Nevada, Reno.

CHAPTER XIV

The Last Barrier Overcome

OUR camp was only about five miles from Pyramid Lake,⁴⁶ the terminus of Truckee River, which I very much desired to visit, but the condition of my health denied me the pleasure. Although I had been without sleep for two successive nights, last night I slept but little, owing to a high fever, and severe headache; but this morning a bath in the river induced a copious perspiration, which while relieving my fever, makes me feel the need of rest.

Near our camp are several trading posts where, had we money, we might purchase flour and bacon at three dollars a pound. These supplies have been brought from California, and while the prices are far above our reach, they bring us inspiration in the fact that we are nearing the end of our journey. Crowds are continually arriving

⁴⁶ Discovered and named by Fremont, January 13, 1844. He camped January 15 on the Truckee, which, by reason of its delicious fish, he named Salmon-trout River. From this point traveling for some distance along Truckee River, he accomplished his laborious and dangerous winter journey to Sutter's Fort on the Sacramento, reaching there March 8, 1844. From the pass through the mountains he had descended the valley of the American River.

from the desert. Ragged, dusty, weary, and starved they come, some with wagons, others driving their worn-out teams unharnessed or unyoked, many whose teams have perished, sunburnt and weatherbeaten, with their last morsel of provisions in knapsacks on their backs, with bruised, blistered, and bleeding feet, plodding through the hot sand, their nervous sensibilities deadened by excessive toil and pain.

Tuesday, September 10. A sunrise balmy and bright came over the desert, and its first beams found us on our way. Following up the Truckee, on a sandy road, in four miles an abrupt mountain shut out the valley, compelling us to cross the stream, which we found quite dangerous, because of the swift current and deep water. In one mile and a half another rocky spur joined the river, causing us to ford it again. This crossing was more perilous than the other, and here I came near losing my life. The water at the ford was over three feet deep, very swift, and a few rods below plunged over a precipice, breaking upon a succession of rocky shelves. As the oxen neared the middle of the river, pressed by the current they swayed downward into greater depth, and I immediately plunged in and succeeded in turning them toward the bank; but as the wagon, which had broken the force of the stream, passed on, I found it impossible to wade against the current.

On either side or below it was eight or ten feet deep,

and I could not prevent slipping on the smooth rocks into deeper water. My only chance was to swim ashore before being carried over the falls. Springing with all my might toward the northern bank, the great swells seemed to carry me at lightning speed, and when poised on the brink of the falls I caught a line thrown me by Mr. Matlock. He had seen the danger, and with wonderful presence of mind, grasped a rope and dashed into the river. Courageously wading the stream so as to make sure of success, he threw it to me, and bracing himself, safely hauled me ashore.

One mile farther brought us to another ford, where we stopped for dinner, and in the afternoon forded the river four times, each being very dangerous on account of the deep, swift current, and large rocks in the bottom.

Descending to a low, narrow flat, we camped among large cottonwood trees with scant pasturage for our teams. Having crossed the river six times, and the road being rocky, we traveled today but twelve miles. Parallel ranges of mountains rise on either side of the valley, their sharp pointed spurs bending the river into a series of acute angles.

Wednesday, September 11. The air was chilly, and a white frost sparkled on the willows and fading leaves. Leaving camp at daybreak, and turning from the river, we passed through a narrow gorge in the mountain,

descending again to a low, green meadow on the river bank, where we stopped to let the oxen feed.

After devouring our ration of beef, which seemed only to sharpen our appetites for breakfast, some went fishing, and others explored the glens for berries. Fishing proved a failure, but we found a few wild raspberries, and a considerable quantity of the ripe capsules of the wild rose. The seeds, and cotton-like fiber within, were dry, but the outside was palatable, and it only required good teeth to grind up the seeds. After this for several days these capsules were our principal food.

Permitting the oxen to feed until eleven in the forenoon, we resumed our journey up the river, and in about seven miles turned to the right up a long, winding ravine. Three miles brought us to the summit, and passing down a very steep descent, in two miles we again reached the river and camped among some large aspen trees, under the shadow of steep mountains. The valley was narrow, but afforded excellent grass; something we have learned to value for the sake of our faithful teams. And now that we are reduced to less than half rations, and are tempted to hurry on for our own relief, our sympathies with the oxen that have suffered so much, compel us to stop long enough to let them feed and rest.

Thursday, September 12. Our train forded the river this morning, but as I supposed it would soon recross, I

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remained on the north side. Climbing a high point of rocks, and ascending a spur, I came out on an overhanging cliff about a mile up the river, and to my surprise, saw extending far to the southwest a broad and beautiful valley. Through its center, the river bending gracefully beneath the shade of autumn tinted trees, and drooping willows, in silver-like beauty, wound its way from the distant mountains to the deep, narrow chasm at my left.

Rich pasturage filled the plain, traced in lines of green and gold; while far in the distance appeared the snow-capped Sierra Nevada, with its dark pine forests forming a belt at the base of some high peak, or stretched in wavy furrows across the hills.

At the foot of the bluff I found a pavement of granite blocks, and various fragments which appeared to have been wrought out by human hands; and at a distance of three-fourths of a mile, on the plain, stood a block of dark granite about eight feet high and ten feet square at the top, its foundation being below the present alluvial surface of the valley. One side of this rock was covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions.

Following up the river and passing quite a village of bough braided wigwams, recently deserted by the Indians, about noon I found a shallow place, and wading across, joined the train, which had halted for dinner in a willow glade.

Leaving the valley late in the afternoon we crossed a low ridge on which grew great quantities of wild onions. The tops were withered, but the bulbs, sound and good, added to our supply of food, giving us the unusual menu of rose buds and onions. Descending among large granite boulders we camped on the river bank, beneath the whispering boughs of a large pine.

Friday, September 13. Thus far since crossing the desert we have failed to find either fish or game. Perhaps it was owing to the multitudes who daily besieged both hill and stream, but hope and hunger never fail, and so the search is renewed each day. This morning when our train left camp, R. McCord, I. J. Hughes, and I started on a hunting excursion along the mountain range south of the river.

Following up a ravine we found a small stream strongly impregnated with alum, and the pebbles in the channel thickly coated. Soon we came to a deep, vaulted gulch, across which was a thick horizontal stratum of pure crystallized alum. While engaged in breaking off some pieces to carry as specimens to camp, we observed a herd of antelope looking down upon us from the cliffs above. Hastily dropping a few lumps into our pockets, we scaled the heights, only to see our intended victims playfully scampering up a wooded acclivity half a mile distant. Trying to keep ourselves concealed from their sight we followed them through the pine woods, over

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the ridges, across the mountains, but they never seemed to lose sight of us, and never permitted themselves to come within range of our rifles. In the most tantalizing way they eluded us at every turn, and at last when the day declined, and the glens and gulches grew dark, tired and disappointed, we gave up the chase.

During the day we had followed a chain of mountains with which the road lay parallel up the Truckee, and consequently, at nightfall, had only to descend one of the abrupt spurs in order to reach our train, which after crossing the river three times during the day, camped on the north bank.

The spur selected terminated in a very steep, gravelly bank, crowned with a ledge of slate. We each selected a broad slate, upon which, amid a torrent of pebbles, clouds of dust, and with thunderous noise, we glided swiftly down the bank. That ride in the twilight was exhilarating, but the sudden and unexpected stop among large stones at the bottom, though accomplished in safety, was none the less dangerous.

A fine spring gushed from the base of this hill, around which stood several deserted wigwams; the builders doubtless flying before the tide of emigration, which had usurped their haunts of hunting and fishing, and thus cut off the supplies upon which these Indians depended for a living. Crossing some low ridges we descended among large pines to the river, which we waded at an

easy ford, and found our train encamped in a beautiful pine grove.

Saturday, September 14. Last evening Mr. Abijah Davis, of Wisconsin, came to our camp, having left his company at the head of the Humboldt River, under the impression that he was near the gold region of California, and by his inconsiderate haste had not only made the journey on foot, but had nearly starved.

There is now great suffering from hunger among the emigrants. Those who have but a morsel of food daily, find it necessary to divide that morsel with some one who has none. There are frequent "trading posts," along our road, but few have the money to pay the price of provisions, never less than three dollars a pound, and the principal traffic is in horses, oxen and wagons. Many a fine outfit has been sold by hungry men for a few pounds of flour and bacon. These know how to sympathize with Esau in the sale of his birthright.

It is sad to part with team and wagon on this road; it compels the loss of many useful articles, with many things for which one feels an affectionate regard. It was bad enough to shoulder a pittance of provisions, and with such clothing as one could carry, pursue the way on foot, but to abandon the precious gifts of loving hearts and hands, seemed hardest of all.

Hoping to avoid such a trial, and supposing that provisions were much cheaper across the Sierra Nevada,

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early this morning Mr. Matlock took a horse obtained of some emigrants some time since, and (with about all the money in possession of our mess), went on in advance, intending to cross the mountains, buy provisions, and returning, meet us as soon as possible, while we would try and bring the teams safely through.

Turning northward from the river our road ascended among large pine and cedar trees to the summit of a high mountain, and descending by a gentle slope, crossed a series of low pine covered ridges, and finally came to a large creek, where we camped.

All day the sun shone brightly but there had been a chill in the air, and the annual leaves by their yellow tints warn us that autumn is passing. When we left our homes, snow still lingered, but spring and summer have gone, and the cold wind again sounds the approach of winter, and yet, like Israel, we sojourn in the wilderness; but unfortunately, we are not so well fed.

Two men from California with a couple of mules loaded with provisions, a keg of liquor, and a small tent, have opened a "trading post" in this valley.⁴⁷ We tented near them, and this evening three men offered to trade them a large mule for flour. Knowing that its owners were destitute of both money and provisions, the traders

⁴⁷ If this was Beckwourth's Valley the tent became in the course of two years a framed house called War Horse Ranch. Beckwourth settled there that year. L. C. Draper, *Collections of the Wis. Hist. Soc.*, VI, 280, note.

took advantage of their necessity and offered them six pounds of flour for the mule.

"No," said one, "we can't agree to that; six pounds would not last us half way to the mines, and when the mule and flour are gone we will starve. Certainly you can let us have enough flour to last us in, say twenty-five pounds, and the mule is yours."

"Can't do it," said the trader, decidedly.

"Well," came the reply, "we can't agree to your terms; we'll eat the mule first."

Turning away from the tent, they went a few rods down the creek and built a fire. Soon one was observed coming back.

"Now I reckon they've come to their appetites," said one of the traders to his companion.

The man came up and tried to bargain with them again.

"Six pounds or nothing," was the reply, making ready to weigh the flour.

Tired and starving, yet with a dignified independence he walked back to his companions, and after a short consultation the mule was shot, an ample supper made of its flesh, and then the meat, flayed from the bones, was dried over the fire, and no doubt, afforded them sufficient food for the rest of the journey.

Sunday, September 15. The air was cold, and a white frost gemmed the leaves and grass. A cup of hot coffee,

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with the last of our jerked beef, constituted breakfast, and the first sunbeams found us on our way. The road crossed a succession of ridges mantled with a dense pine forest, rising gradually as we neared the summit of the Sierra Nevada, whose snowy peaks rose in wild magnificence against the sky. Although the road was rough, and in some places steep, the air was cool, and we traveled about twenty miles, camping near one of Captain Donner's old cabins on the last branch of Truckee.

In this valley we found another trading post, and being entirely destitute of provisions, we were glad to obtain a few pounds of flour.

Monday, September 16. Early this morning I visited Truckee Lake, half a mile above our camp. It is about three and a half miles long and one wide. Around the margin is a belt of tall spruce, fir and pine trees, and toward the west, in sublime grandeur, rise the granite cliffs of the Sierra Nevada. So securely is it embosomed among rocks and trees, it would seem that no breeze could wake a ripple across its crystal surface.

Near the outlet of the lake were the ruins of the cabins built by the ill-fated Donner Party who, nearly four years ago, in 1846, detained in exploring a new route, did not reach the pass of the Sierra Nevada until the last of October. Snow had fallen that year earlier than usual, and was so deep they could not take their teams over the pass, and were consequently detained through the

winter. By an unexpected fall of snow to the depth of fifteen or twenty feet, most of their stock was buried and lost. This reduced their supply of provision, and having consumed all their food, they subsisted for a time upon beef hides, articles of leather, and finally on the bodies of their companions who died of starvation.

When news of their situation was received at Sutter's Fort, through one of the party who succeeded in crossing the mountains on snow shoes early in November, men and provisions were sent to their relief, but the great difficulty of crossing the snow-blockaded mountain caused delay, and only forty-four survived to reach Sutter's Fort; the remainder, thirty-three, perished in the mountains.⁴⁸

Most of the cabins had been burned, and their charred remains, and the whitened bones, half buried among withered pine leaves, are sad memorials of the event. Also the tall stumps, some twenty feet high, showing where the trees were cut, gave an idea of the great depth of snow.

From our camp to the summit, over seven miles, the road was very steep; in places passing over large granite boulders. Consequently we climbed slowly, and at noon stopped at a large spring, half a mile from the highest point. After resting awhile, most of the oxen were

⁴⁸ A good summary of this gruesome tragedy can be read in Cleland, R. G., *A History of California, the American Period*, pp. 123-127.

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attached to a single wagon, and with difficulty it was drawn up the precipitous ascent. This was repeated until all the wagons were on the mountain top.

Having reached the height of the last mountain range, so we could look forward from its summit to the land of our dreams, toil and hope, we gave three long and loud cheers. Looking down the steep gorge whence we had come, we bade adieu to its dark avenues, towering cliffs, sequestered shades, bright waters and melancholy scenes. We felt a real relief in bidding farewell to the mountains, valleys, and deserts of the great interior, with its adventure, romance, tragedy, sorrow, suffering and death—scenes which will linger in our minds as memorials of our journey across the plains.

A short distance north of the pass I climbed the dizzy heights of a granite peak. The view was magnificent. Perennial snow, rock, chasm, forest, lake and stream; a veritable map of one of the wildest, grandest parts of America, spread out on every side.

By making a series of acute angles, our road down the precipitous western slope was quite easy; and from thence, following a mountain gorge about four miles, we came to a small valley, overgrown with grass and clover, and belted around by a dense pine forest.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Willow Spring Valley? The best general geography of the route will be found in Willis T. Lee et al: *Guidebook of the Western United States, Part B, The Overland Route*. Washington, Govt. Printing Office, 1916.

Here we camped, and turning the oxen to feed in the fresh pasture, we built a large fire on the bank of a clear brook and although few could boast of anything for supper better than a scanty ration of bean soup, there arose through the tall woods, the merry laugh and almost forgotten song, and a more than usual cheerfulness pervaded the camp.

Tuesday, September 17. Scarcely a blush mantled the eastern sky at the approach of morning, the rarefied breeze came whispering through the pines, and a white frost sparkled on the grass. The tents were folded, and the drowsy oxen and dusty wagons moved carelessly down the valley. In about two miles, turning into the deep pine woods on our left, we passed under the dense boughs that, like cloud piled upon cloud, shut out the sun.

Our road was very rocky, and during the forenoon we passed five small lakes, clear, cold, of great depth, the banks generally perpendicular and of granite. At noon we stopped at the fifth lake to let the oxen feed.

Our mess being entirely out of provisions, it was gravely resolved to make this a fast day; but just as we were leaving the lake, Mr. Matlock met us, having obtained a supply of flour and bacon. The aforesaid resolution was promptly rescinded, the oxen unyoked, a fire kindled, and soon a large, hot cake, nicely browned, with an ample supply of bacon and coffee, tempted us to dine. Just how long we had been sharpening our appetites for

that dinner, might be difficult to determine, but we were all ready, and greatly appreciated the event.

In the afternoon, our road accommodating itself to the chasmed furrows of the mountain side, was bent into numerous curves and angles. Our train at times was buried beneath the drooping foliage of pine and fir, and again rose over some rocky point where the sparse trees left an opening for the sun.

On one of these heights we met a company of Mexicans with a train of mules packed with provisions, which had been sent by the generous miners of California to be distributed gratuitously among the suffering emigrants on the other side of the mountains. We all felt glad, not only at the prospect of the hungry travelers being relieved, but there was something in this kind act which commended the people of California. The stories of soul freezing avarice prevailing in the mines, told us by traders who were taking advantage of the starving condition of the emigrants to plunder them, found a sufficient denial in this train.

In the deepening night we descended an abrupt bank into a pine grove where the music of a rill betrayed its presence, to which we groped our way and camped, turning the oxen among the trees to find their supper as best they could.

Wednesday, September 18. Morning revealed a magnificent view of mountain scenery. We followed down

the brook upon a bed of large granite boulders, difficult for the teams and dangerous to the wagons. About noon our road became easier, and for several miles we traveled in the cool shade of live oak and alder, when we reached the brink of a deep abyss down which the stream, by a succession of cascades, fell in spray and was again collected in the chasm below. On our right a mountain peak towered far into the sky, encircled with bands of perpendicular rocks.

Turning up a rocky ravine on our left, in about four miles we reached the mountain summit, where the last gleam of daylight disclosed the broad surface of a pond. Lack of grass for our teams compelled us to go on, and Mr. Matlock piloted us through the darkness, down the mountain, among great pines, whose foliage shut out the stars. Late at night we camped by a small brook.

Thursday, September 19. A delightful dawn crept down through the tree tops. Breakfast over, we crossed a low ridge, and in about three miles halted on a small prairie, where we spent the forenoon and took dinner. Then we wound, by a curving road up an easy slope, to the brink of a precipitous descent of about four hundred yards. All but one yoke of oxen were removed from each wagon, the wheels rough-locked, and a line tied to the hind axle by which three or four men held fast, to regulate the motion. The wagons were then shoved off, when

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one after another thundered down over the rocks, through a cloud of dust, into the valley below.

Here we found a restaurant, built of logs and covered with pine boughs. On one of the puncheon tables I found a copy of the New York *Tribune*, in mourning dress, announcing the death of President Taylor, on July 9, 1850. This was our first notice of the event. For more than four months we had been shut out from the world, and had lost trace of its affairs; and although the latest papers were not new, it was pleasant to come within hail of the great world once more.

CHAPTER XV

In the Land of Gold

MOUNTAINS of great height enclose this valley and at their base is a splendid grove of pine and cedar, surrounding a small, level prairie through which flows a rippling brook, the highest branch of Bear River, and from which this basin-shaped vale takes the name of Bear Valley.

Friday, September 20. We remained in the valley and prepared some hay to feed the oxen while crossing the mountains to Nevada City, a distance of about thirty miles.

Being near the place of our destination we begin to anticipate release from the unremitting vigils of the camp; for whatever toil, privation, or danger we may encounter in the mines, a change in the routine of the camp will be a relief. It may be long ere we again repose in the security of home, but there is not one in our company who can not sweetly rest on the bosom of Mother Earth, under the spreading boughs, or star-lit sky; or the quiet of whose dreams would be disturbed by the jarring thunder, tempest, cataract, or howling wolf. With all

these we are familiar. It is the thought of kindred, friends, and home ever welcome, but strangely depressing, which come in the silent hours, that often defy the powers of slumber.

Saturday, September 21. When I was relieved from guard at midnight, the archway of the sky was radiant with stars; but this morning not even a dim outline of the great mountains could be seen. A dense cloud had settled in the valley, and torrents of rain fell upon the tents with that steady patter, which indicates a protracted storm.

Aware that autumnal rains in California were sometimes of long duration, we resolved to pursue our journey without delay. Climbing the steep mountain road to the summit, we struck off in a westerly course, along a heavily timbered ridge and in fifteen miles reached a large spring. It was early in the afternoon, but the rain was still falling, and the summer's accumulation of dust was now deep mud. This, with the prospect of having to camp without water for cooking, if we ventured farther, induced us to remain near the spring; so, building a large fire beneath a sheltering pine, we cooked supper and partially dried our clothes. Near the spring stood a log hotel, which we found to be a kind of half-way house between Nevada City on Deer Creek, and Washington on the south fork of the Yuba River.

Sunday, September 22. Some time last night the rain

ceased, and at dawn the mist descended and soon disappeared, giving us a bright, calm day. It was our intention to remain in camp, but we had not sufficient hay for the teams, and we dared not let them browse among the trees lest, by feeding on the poison oak (a viny evergreen, which grows in abundance in this vicinity), it might prove as fatal to them as it had already to others that we found dead in the woods. We therefore sought a place of greater safety, and in thirteen miles, through a forest of pine and cedar, came to Rock Creek, where we found a supply of grass and camped in a grove of ancient-looking oaks.

A few small cabins nestled in the overshadowed glens, and an occasional miner with pickaxe, shovel and pan, carelessly strolling along the ravines, "looking for a place to make grub," were the only objects of interest. We were only about three miles from Nevada City, the nucleus of a large mining district, and it was pleasant to observe the serene quiet which marked the Sabbath.

This evening finds us in the California gold mines; virtually at the end of our long and somewhat adventurous journey. And while there is a satisfaction in having come safely through, there is sadness in the thought that our daily, intimate association is about to be broken up, and even within a week we may be separated never to meet again on earth. While the feeling failed to find expression in words, there was a subdued tenderness of manner

which told how deeply we had become attached to each other, and how painful the thought of separation.

While grouped in the shadow of our last camping tree, permit me to present each member of our little mess personally to the reader.

John L. Young, the oldest of our company, is a native of New York; he has fair complexion, light hair inclined to baldness, and is somewhat corpulent. A man of sound judgment, he has a genial nature, inclined to see the droll as well as the bright side of things. He was so familiar and confidential with the boys, that, without the least disrespect, they paraphrased his name into the paradox, "Old Young."

Probably the next according to age was George Matlock, I believe a native of Illinois; tall, muscular, with ruddy complexion and red hair: one of nature's noblemen. He was possessed of fine moral and religious sentiments, a good singer, and genial companion. Trials and difficulties only brought to view the finest traits of manhood, and taught those with whom he was associated to love and trust him. He died within two months after reaching Nevada City.

Abraham Hughes, some forty years of age, and his brother, Isaiah Jeremiah Hughes, about twenty-one, are from Indiana. They greatly resemble each other, being tall and slim, with sandy complexions, and dark auburn hair. Abraham is reticent and somewhat eccentric,

familiarly called "Old Bach," a man of extensive reading and scholarship. Isaiah, active, musical, overflowing with mirth, usually managed to keep those around him happy, or at least, good natured. Messrs. Young and Matlock married sisters of Messrs. Hughes, but the rest of the company were single.

Robert McCord was about twenty years of age, of medium height, muscular without being fleshy, a light blond with blue eyes that reveal the feelings of the heart; that can laugh or flash, as occasion may require. Ever constant in friendship, cool in danger, he is a comrade that never disappoints you.

John Donnelly, not yet twenty years of age, is rather short and slight, with fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. In his hand he holds a fife, which has been his companion in many sad and bloody scenes; for, as a musician he has served five years in the army of the United States, and faced the foe "on carnage covered fields" in Mexico. He is a native of Ireland, and his father having enlisted, John, though quite young, was accepted as a musician. Kindly in disposition, his varied experiences and sociability make him a pleasant companion.

Perhaps of all the multitudes who have traveled together across the plains in the intimate relation of messmates, and have in sickness, sleeplessness and toil, endured the trial of patience and temper, none have been

more constant, considerate and kind to each other than our little mess of seven.

Monday, September 23. Early this morning we moved to Nevada City, and gave the oxen in charge of a ranchero, who started with them to his ranch in the valley of the Sacramento. They had done good service and we parted with them as with tried friends. Ever patient and faithful, we suffered together, though as is too often the case even with people in the power of others, and compelled to submit, they generally fared the worse. Their labor is now ended and it is humiliating to think that as a reward for all they have endured, in a few months they will be killed, and sliced up among the miners, on the demon-like principle of returning evil for good.

Our company being now disbanded, a few of the tents were pitched in the shade of some large pines in the upper part of the city, and we were soon scattered among the adjoining hills and ravines to see the mines.

East of the city was a range of hills, which for a distance of over three miles was perforated with holes, and swarming with people, like the busy inhabitants of an ant hill. From the fancied resemblance of these mines to the burrows of the coyote, or California wolf, they were known as the Coyote Diggings.

Here were some of the richest mines yet discovered in California, but the gold in some places is found at a

depth of over a hundred feet. Shafts are sunk to the granite, or bed rock, and on this the gold is found in a stratum of gravel from one to four feet in thickness, though there is some gold mixed with the earth all the way to the surface. It is usually in fine scales, from the size of a pumpkin seed down to the point of a pin.

By drifts or burrows, radiating from the shaft, the gravel, or "pay dirt" was removed. Timbers about a foot square, and four feet long, supported by posts of the same dimensions, hold the earth firmly overhead until the entire paying stratum is removed. It is not uncommon that a single tub (half barrel), of this gravel is found to contain a thousand dollars worth of gold.

Following down a ravine, the center of which, with its rocks and trees, had been torn up by gold hunters, I passed through Nevada City, which was little else than a row of canvas covered houses on either side of the emigrant road in the valley of Deer Creek.

The street and surroundings were filled with people. Every nation, island and tribe seemed to have its emigrant representative. Here were all grades of society, from the latest devotee of fashion from Paris, to the tattooed New Zealander, and all shades of complexion, from the pale, blue-eyed stranger from the bleak hills of Norway to the swarthy Ethiopian from the hot sands of Africa; while all the living languages seemed to find utterance in the motley crowd.

Moving on through that strange mass of humanity, like one in a dream, I at last reached Deer Creek. Here the gravel from the Coyote Diggings was washed, and the clang of shovels, longtoms, rockers, pans, and the vociferous jargon of strange tongues, broke in weird confusion on my ears.

Passing a row of large buildings, strains of stirring music arose with such swell, trill and cadence, that I paused to listen. Stepping inside of a spacious apartment I saw upon numerous tables piles of gold and silver coin, with various valuable specimens of gold from the mines. There was also a display of pistols and bowie knives, and grouped around each table a gambling company. At some they were silent, and deeply intent on the game; at others, flushed and desperate; at still other tables, angry and threatening.

I had never before looked upon such a scene. In nationality, color and language it resembled the crowd on the street, only here was a larger proportion of young men and boys, and a general evidence of a greater or less degree of intoxication. From a bar, which occupied one side of the room, liquors were dealt out to a boisterous throng, whose blasphemies and ribald jests were enough

To make one shudder and grow sick at heart.

Four men in a kind of gallery, near the main entrance, by discoursing instrumental and vocal music, attracted

the passers from the street; and there was something wonderful in its attractive power.

I turned to go out, but my glance fell upon a large mirror, and the image it reflected at once arrested my attention. It was a human face, sun-tanned and brown as the barehead Indian who roams the woods, the bleached outlines of an incipient beard around mouth and chin; a mass of long tangled hair, reaching to the shoulders; boyish features, and withal so thin and mature it might have puzzled an anthropologist to determine which of the numerous races it represented.

I, however, had an impression that often before I had seen its dim outline, mirrored in the mountain stream, or bubbling spring, where I had stooped to drink. But then some relieving ripple always disarranged the exact resemblance to that which bent above.

Day at last declined, and I returned to the camp of my companions; and as twilight deepened, the woods, and every cliff and glen were illuminated by innumerable camp fires. The miners, having returned from their work, were engaged in cooking supper preparatory to their much needed rest.

Reader, the busy scenes of the day, the burrowed hills, uprooted trees and overturned rocks along the ravines, the gleaming fires, no longer in line with the road, and the absence of teams and wagons, remind us that we

IN THE LAND OF GOLD

have reached the mines, and have completed the road to California.

If you desire to continue the acquaintance, you may find me again in *The Camp and Cabin*, or Gold Mining in California in 1850 and later.

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